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LITTLE NOVELS

ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

LITTLE NOVELS

Translated from the German by
ERIC SUTTON

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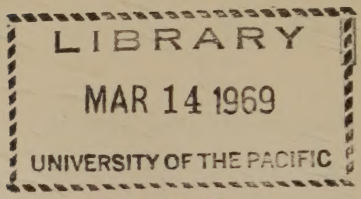

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THE FATE OF THE BARON

THE FATE OF THE BARON

IT WAS ON A MILD EVENING IN MAY THAT KLÄRE Hell made her first reappearance as Queen of the Night. The circumstances that had kept the singer away from the stage for nearly two months were well known. On March 15th the Prince Richard Bedenbruck had been thrown from his horse, and after lingering for a few hours, during which Kläre had not stirred from his side, had died in her arms. Kläre's despair had been so terrible that her friends feared first for her life, then for her reason, and, until lately, for her voice. The last anxiety proved as unfounded as the first two. When she appeared on the stage she was greeted with friendly curiosity, but after the first great aria it was clear that her intimate friends could safely accept the congratulations of her more distant acquaintances. In the gallery the childish face of little Fräulein Fanny Ringeiser could be seen glowing with delight, and the regular opera-goers in the upper tiers smiled knowingly at their little friend. They all knew

that Fanny, although she was only the daughter of a shop assistant on the Mariahilferstrasse, belonged to the beloved singer's inner circle, had often been invited to parties at her house and had been secretly in love with the dead Prince. In the interval, Fanny explained to her many male and female friends that Baron von Leisenbohg had suggested to Kläre the idea of choosing the Queen of the Night for her first part—thinking that the dark costume would be most in harmony with her state of mind.

The Baron himself took his usual stall, the corner seat on the gangway in the first row, and acknowledged the greetings of his acquaintances with a cordial, but almost melancholy, smile. Her mind was full of many memories that evening. He had first met Kläre ten years ago. At that time he was making himself responsible for the artistic training of a slim young lady with red hair, and had looked in one evening for a performance at the Eisenstein School of Singing, in which his protégée was making her first public performance as Mignon. On that same evening he saw and heard Kläre who was singing Philine in the same scene. He was then twenty-five years old, independent, and impulsive. He took no further interest in Mignon, made Frau Natalie Eisenstein introduce him to Philine

after the performance and told her that his heart, his fortune, and his influence with the management of the Opera were all at her disposal. At that time Kläre was living with her mother, the widow of a higher official in the Post Office, and was in love with a young medical student, with whom she often went to tea in his room out in the Alser district. She rejected the Baron's impetuous proposals, but Leisenbohg's homage inclined her to a more complaisant attitude of mind, and she became the medical student's mistress. She made no secret of this to the Baron, who returned to his red-haired protégée, but pursued his acquaintance with Kläre. On all festivals that gave him any sort of excuse, he sent her presents of flowers and sweets, and from time to time he paid a formal call at the house of the postal official's widow.

In the autumn of that year, Kläre got her first engagement at Detmold. Baron von Leisenbohg, who at that time still had a post under the Government, took advantage of his first Christmas leave to pay Kläre a visit in her new abode. He knew that the medical student had become a doctor and had married in September, and he was tempted to hope once more. But Kläre, with her usual straightforwardness, told the Baron immediately he arrived that she had estab-

lished tender relations with the tenor at the Court Theatre: thus it befell therefore, that the only memories Leisenbohg could carry away from Detmold were of a platonic stroll in the little public park, and a supper at the theatre restaurant with a few fellow artists of both sexes. In spite of this, he made several more journeys to Detmold, took great pleasure in Kläre's devotion to her art and the unmistakable progress that she made, and, moreover, hoped for better luck next season, for which the tenor was under contract to sing in Hamburg. But that year, too, he was disappointed, as Kläre felt obliged to yield to the solicitations of a Dutch merchant in a large way of business, by the name of Louis Verhajen.

When Kläre, in her third season, was offered an engagement at the Dresden Court Theatre, in spite of his youth the Baron gave up a very promising official career and migrated to Dresden. He spent every evening with Kläre and her mother, who had always known how to maintain the most admirable detachment in all her relations with her daughter, and began to hope again. Unfortunately the Dutchman had the unpleasant habit whenever he wrote of anouncing his arrival for the following day, and informing his beloved that she was surrounded by

an army of spies, and threatening her with every variety of painful death, if she was not faithful to him. As he never came, and Kläre was gradually getting into an extremely nervous state, Leisenbohg decided to end the business at any cost, and went to Detmold to try to see the man personally. To his amazement, the Dutchman explained that he had sent these passionate and threatening missives purely from a sense of chivalry, and that he would really be exceedingly relieved to be freed from any further responsibility. In high satisfaction Leisenbohg took the train back to Dresden, and informed Kläre of the agreeable outcome of the interview. She thanked him warmly, but avoided the Baron's attempts at tender advances in so decided a manner that he was quite taken aback. After a few brief and searching questions she finally admitted that during his absence no less a person than Prince Kajetan had conceived a violent passion for her and had sworn to do himself an injury if she did not take pity on him. So, of course, she had had at last to give way, to avoid plunging the ruling family and the nation into the most unspeakable grief.

With a heart that showed signs of breaking, Leisenbohg left the city and went back to Vienna. Here he

began to pull wires, and it was not a little due to his persistent efforts that Kläre received an offer from the Vienna Opera for the very next year. After a successful tour, she took up her engagement in October, and the Baron's magnificent basket of flowers, that she found on the evening when she first entered her dressing-room, seemed like the expression of an entreaty and a hope. But her generous admirer had once again to endure the experience of having come too late. The fair-haired gentleman who played for her while she had been practising during the last few weeks—he was pretty well known as a song composer—had acquired rights over her which she was bound in honour to respect. Since then seven years had passed. The accompanist had been succeeded by Herr Klemens von Rhodoewyl, the dashing gentleman-jockey; Herr von Rhodoewyl was followed by Vincenz Klaudi, the conductor, who often sang the music of the operas he was conducting, so loudly that the singers could not be heard; after him came the Count von Alban-Rattony, who had gambled away his Hungarian estates at cards, but had made up for it by winning a castle in Lower Austria; the next was Herr Edgar Wilhelm, who wrote ballet librettos (for which highly paid composers wrote the music), tragedies produced at his own

expense at the Jansch theatre, and poems printed in elegant type in the stupidest kind of Court journal. Herr Wilhelm was succeeded by a gentleman named Amandus Meier, who had nothing to recommend him but his age, which was nineteen, and his appearance, which was charming, and whose sole possession was a fox-terrier that could stand on its head; after Herr Meier came the best dressed man in the kingdom—Prince Richard Bedenbruck.

Kläre had never made any secret of these affairs. Hers was, and continued to be, a simple bourgeois household in which the master changed from time to time. Her public popularity was extraordinary. In higher circles she was looked on with not a little favour for going to Mass every Sunday, confessing twice a month, wearing on her bosom as an amulet a picture of the Madonna blessed by the Pope, and never going to bed without saying her prayers. There were few bazaars at which she was not in charge of a stall, and ladies of the aristocracy, as well as those of Jewish financial circles, were delighted to be able to offer their wares under the same marquee as Kläre. She bestowed fascinating smiles on youthful enthusiasts of both sexes who waited for her by the stage door. She distributed her bouquets among the patient

crowd, and once, when she had left the flowers behind her in her dressing-room, she said in that refreshing Viennese of hers that seemed to suit her looks so well: "Oh God, I've left the stuff up in my room; come tomorrow afternoon, my dears, if you still want any." Then she jumped into her carriage, put her head out of the window, and cried as she drove off: "You'll get some coffee, too!"

Fanny Ringeiser had been one of the few who had had the nerve to accept this invitation. Kläre fell into a chaffing conversation with her, enquired about her family with all the affability of an archduchess, and found the ingenuous and adoring girl's chatter so much to her liking that she asked her to come again soon. Fanny did so, and it came about that she soon achieved a position of importance in the singer's household; and she managed to keep it, mainly because, though Kläre was very ready with her confidences, Fanny never fully confided in her in return. In the course of years, Fanny had received a succession of proposals, mostly from the young sons of the Mariahilferstrasse shopkeepers with whom she used to go to dances. But she rejected them all, owing to the fact that she fell, with irrevocable regularity, in love with Kläre's admirer for the time being.

Kläre had in fact loved Prince Bedenbruck just as faithfully but much more passionately than his predecessors, and Leisenbohg, who in spite of his innumerable disappointments had never given up hope, had begun to be seriously afraid that the happiness he had yearned for these ten long years would never blossom now. Whenever he saw anyone falling out of her favour, he had always discharged his mistress so as to be ready for all contingencies, and at any moment. And he did so after Prince Richard's sudden death; but, for the first time, more from habit than conviction. For Kläre's grief seemed so boundless that everyone could not help believing that she had finished for ever with the delights of love. She drove out to the cemetery every day and laid flowers on the grave of the departed. She flung away all her gay clothes and locked up her jewelry in the innermost drawers of her writing-table. Much serious expostulation was needed to dissuade her from leaving the stage for ever.

After her first reappearance, which had gone off so brilliantly, her life, outwardly at any rate, resumed its wonted course. Her original circle of less intimate acquaintances gathered round once more. The music critic, Bernhard Feuerstein, appeared, his

coat stained with spinach or tomato, in accordance with what he might have had for lunch, and, to Kläre's unconcealed delight, abused her fellow artists of both sexes, including the Director himself. She allowed Prince Richard's two cousins, Lucius and Christian, Bedenbrucks of the other line, to make love to her in their usual light-hearted but respectful way; a gentleman from the French Embassy and a young Czech pianist were brought to see her, and on June 10th she drove to the races again for the first time. But, as Prince Lucius, who had a touch of poetry about him, expressed it, only her soul was awake, her heart was still sunk in slumber. It was true that if one of her younger or older friends ventured the slightest suggestion that there were such things as love and passion in the world, every trace of a smile vanished from her face, she stared darkly in front of her, and from time to time raised her hand in a strange gesture of repulsion which seemed intended to apply to all men, and for ever.

In the latter half of the month of June it so happened that a singer from the north, named Sigurd Ölse, sang Tristan at the Opera. His voice was clear and powerful, though it was not really first-rate; he was almost a giant in stature, though inclining

towards stoutness, and, in repose, his face was lacking in individual expression; but as soon as he began to sing, his steel-grey eyes flashed with a sort of secret inner light, and his voice and look seemed to reduce everybody, more especially women, to a state of ecstatic admiration.

Kläre sat in the theatre-box with some of her fellow artists who were not singing that night. She alone seemed to remain unmoved. Next morning Sigurd Ölse was introduced to her in the manager's office. She spoke kindly, but quite coldly about his performance on the previous evening. The same afternoon he called upon her, though she had not invited him to do so. Leisenbohg and Fanny Ringeiser were present and Sigurd drank tea with them. He spoke of his parents who were fisher-folk living in a little Norwegian village, of the marvellous discovery of his talent as a singer by a passing Englishman who had landed from a white yacht in that far-distant fjord; of his wife, an Italian, who had died on the Atlantic Ocean during their honeymoon and who had been buried at sea. After he had taken his departure the others stayed for some time in silence. Fanny stared gravely into her empty tea cup, Kläre sat down at the piano with her elbows on the closed keyboard, while the Baron

sank into a silent and anxious meditation as to why, during the account of Sigurd's honeymoon, Kläre had omitted that strange gesture by which, since the Prince's death, she indicated that any suggestion of passion or affection could have no place whatever in her future life.

The next parts that Sigurd Ölse sang were Siegfried and Lohengrin. On each occasion Kläre sat in her box and made no sign. But the singer, whose only other acquaintance was the Norwegian Ambassador, appeared at Kläre's house every afternoon; Fräulein Fanny Ringeiser was usually there, and the Baron von Leisenbohg always.

On June 27th he sang Tristan for the last time. Kläre sat in the theatre-box and made no sign. The next day she drove with Fanny to the cemetery and laid a gigantic cross on the Prince's grave; and in the evening she gave a party in honour of the singer who was to leave Vienna on the morrow.

Her circle of friends was present in full strength. The passion that Sigurd had conceived for Kläre was obvious to everyone; as his custom was, he was voluble and excited. He mentioned incidentally that while on the ship crossing to the Continent an Arabian

lady, married to a Russian Grand Duke, had read his hand and prophesied that the immediate future would be the most fateful period in his life. He believed firmly in this prophecy, and, indeed, superstition seemed to him something more than a means of exciting interest. He also said it was generally known that last year, on landing in New York, where he had gone to fulfill an engagement, that every day—that every hour in fact—notwithstanding the enormous fine involved, he boarded a ship for Europe simply because a black cat had walked between his legs on the gangway. He had certainly every reason to believe in the secret connections between such inexplicable omens and the fates of men. One evening at the Covent Garden Theatre in London, before going on the stage he had omitted to repeat a certain magic formula he had received from his grandmother, and his voice had suddenly failed him. One night a winged genius in pink tights had appeared to him in a dream and predicted the death of his favourite barber, and sure enough the unfortunate man was found hanged the next morning. Moreover, he always carried about with him a short but highly significant missive which had been handed to him at a spiritualist séance in

Brussels by the spirit of the dead singer, Cornelia Lujan, and contained a prophecy, in fluent Portuguese, that he was destined to become the greatest singer in the Old and New Worlds.

All these experiences he related that evening; and when the spirit letter (written on rose-coloured paper manufactured by Glienwood & Co.) was passed from hand to hand, the effect on the company was profound and universal. Kläre did not move a muscle, but merely nodded indifferently once or twice. In spite of this Leisenbohg's anxiety grew more and more acute. To his penetrating eyes the signs of threatening danger grew ever more ominous. Worst of all, Sigurd, like all Kläre's previous lovers, conceived an extraordinary liking for him during supper, invited him to his house on the Molde-Fjord, and ended by addressing him as "du." Moreover, Fanny trembled all over when Sigurd spoke a word to her, her colour came and went when he looked at her with his great steel-grey eyes, and when he spoke of his approaching departure she burst openly into tears. But Kläre remained perfectly quiet and serious. She barely returned Sigurd's burning glances, she spoke to him no more eagerly than to the rest, and when he at last

kissed her hand and then looked up at her with eyes that seemed full of prayers and promises and desperation, her own remained veiled and her expression unmoved. Leisenbohg observed all this with suspicion and anxiety. But when the party came to an end and all the guests departed, something unexpected happened that took the Baron completely by surprise. He was the last of all to take Kläre's hand in farewell, and hurried to depart; but she held his hand fast and whispered: "Come back again." He thought he could not have heard her rightly. But she pressed his hand again, and, with her lips quite close to his ear, repeated, "Come back again; I shall expect you in an hour."

In a state bordering on ecstasy he went out with the rest. He and Fanny accompanied Sigurd to his hotel, and as though from a far distance he heard the tenor raving about Kläre. Then he took Fanny Ringeiser back through the silent streets, in soft cool night air, to Mariahilferstrasse, and he saw, as though through a mist, her girlish cheeks wet with foolish tears. Then he got into a cab and drove up to Kläre's door. He saw the light glimmering through the curtains of her bedroom, he saw her shadow glide

past, her head appeared in the gap between the curtain and the window, and she nodded to him. He had not been dreaming: she was waiting for him.

Next morning Baron von Leisenbohg went for a ride in the Prater. He felt young and happy. In the late fulfillment of his passion there seemed to be some deeper meaning. His experience of the past night had been the most marvellous surprise—and yet, again, it was nothing but the climax and the inevitable conclusion of his relations with Kläre hitherto. He now felt that it could not have happened otherwise, and fell to making plans for the immediate and more distant future. "How long will she stay on the stage?" he wondered . . . "Perhaps for a few years. Then, but not until then, we will get married. We will live together somewhere in the country not far from Vienna, perhaps in St. Veit or in Lainz. I will buy a small house there, or build one to her liking. We shall live a rather retired life, but often take long trips abroad . . . to Spain, Egypt or India. . . ." Thus he dreamed, as he let his horse canter across the meadows towards the hay-stall. Then he trotted back into the main avenue and got into his carriage at the cross-roads. He told

his coachman to stop at Fossatti's and sent Kläre a bouquet of beautiful dark roses. He breakfasted at home alone, as his custom was, in his house on the Schwarzenbergplatz, and when he had finished he lay down on the divan. He was filled with the most fervent longing for Kläre. What meaning had all the other women had for him? . . . They had served to pass the time, nothing more. And he felt a day would come when Kläre too would say to him: "What were all the others to me? You are the first and only one I ever loved. . . ." And while he lay on the divan with closed eyes, he let the whole succession of them glide past his inner vision. He was sure she had loved none of them before him—perhaps she had loved him always, and in each and all of them! . . .

The Baron then dressed himself and walked slowly through the familiar streets towards her house, as though to savour their first reunion for a few more seconds. There were a good many people about on the Ring, but still it was observable that the season was coming to an end. And Leisenbohg was glad that summer was there, that he could travel with Kläre and they could see the sea and the mountains together —indeed he had very nearly shouted aloud in his delight.

He stood before her house and looked up at her windows. The light of the afternoon sun was reflected from them and almost blinded him. He walked up the two flights of stairs to her door and rang. No one opened. He rang again. No one opened. Then Leisenbohg noticed that the door was padlocked. What did it mean? Had he made a mistake? . . . As a matter of fact there was no plate on her door, but opposite was the one he knew so well: "Lt.-Colonel von Jeleskowitz." . . . There could be no doubt: this was her flat and it was shut up. He hurried down the stairs and flung open the door of the porter's lodge. The porter's wife was sitting in the half-darkness on a bed, one child was peering up at the street through the small underground window, the other was blowing an unrecognisable tune on a comb.

"Is Fräulein Hell not at home?" asked the Baron.

The woman stood up. "No, Herr Baron, Fräulein Hell has gone away."

"What!" cried the Baron. . . . "Oh, yes, of course," he added quickly. "She went about three o'clock, didn't she?"

"No, Herr Baron, about eight o'clock this morning."

"Where did she go? . . . I mean did she go straight . . ." he was talking at random . . . "did she go straight to Dresden?"

"No, Herr Baron; she left no address. She said she would write and say where she was."

"Ah . . . yes—yes . . . of course. Thank you very much."

He hurried away and went out into the street: unconsciously he looked back at the house. The evening sunlight shining in those windows looked very different now! And the sultry summer evening lay like a pall of oppression over the city. Kläre had gone? . . . Why? . . . Had she fled from him? What did it mean? . . . His first thought was to go to the Opera House. But it occurred to him that the vacation began the day after to-morrow, and that Kläre was not singing the last two days. Then he went to 76 Mariahilferstrasse where the Ringeisers lived. An elderly cook opened the door to him and looked at the well-dressed visitor with a certain mistrust. He asked her to call Frau Ringeiser.

"Is Fräulein Fanny at home?" he asked in a tone of excitement that he could no longer control.

"I beg your pardon?" said Frau Ringeiser sharply.

He introduced himself.

"Ah, of course," said Frau Ringeiser. "Please come in, Herr Baron."

He remained standing in the hall and asked once more:

"Is Fräulein Fanny not at home?"

"But the Herr Baron must come in." Leisenbohg had to follow her, and found himself in a dark low-ceilinged room with furniture covered in blue velvet and rep window curtains of the same colour. "No," said Frau Ringeiser, "Fanny is not at home. Fräulein Hell has taken her away for a holiday trip."

"Where?" asked the Baron, and stared at a photograph of Kläre that stood on the piano in a gold frame.

"I don't know where," said Frau Ringeiser. "Fräulein Hell was here at eight o'clock this morning and begged me to let Fanny go with her. . . . And she begged so nicely that I could not say No."

"But where have they gone—where have they gone?" persisted Leisenbohg.

"That I can't tell you. Fanny is going to telegraph as soon as Fräulein Hell has made up her mind where she is going to stay. Perhaps to-morrow or the day after."

"Ah," said Leisenbohg, and dropped on to a kind

of cane stool in front of the piano. He was silent for a few moments, then he suddenly stood up, shook hands with Frau Ringeiser, asked her to excuse him for having disturbed her, and went slowly down the dark staircase of the old house.

He shook his head. She had indeed been careful . . . more careful than was necessary. . . . She might have known that he would not come where he was not wanted.

"Where to now, Herr Baron?" asked the coachman, and Leisenbohg realised that he had been sitting in the open carriage, staring in front of him, for some minutes. And, following a sudden instinct, he answered: "Hotel Bristol."

Sigurd Ölse had not yet gone. He invited the Baron up to his rooms, greeted him eagerly and asked him to spend the last evening in Vienna in his company. Leisenbohg was much struck by the fact that Sigurd Ölse was still actually in Vienna, and the singer's friendliness positively stirred him to tears. Sigurd began at once to talk about Kläre. He asked Leisenbohg to tell him all he knew about her—he knew that the Baron was her oldest and most faithful friend. So Leisenbohg sat down on one of his host's trunks and began to speak of Kläre. It did him good

to be able to talk about her. He told the singer almost everything, except such matters as he felt bound in honour not to mention. Sigurd listened and appeared enraptured.

At supper the singer invited his friend to leave Vienna with him that very evening, and go with him to his estate near Molde. The Baron felt wonderfully comforted. He excused himself for the time being, but promised Ölse to visit him in the course of the summer.

They drove to the station together. "You will take me for a simpleton," said Sigurd, "but I want to pass her window once again."

Leisenbohg threw a sidelong glance at him. Was this perhaps an attempt to make a fool of him, or was it a final proof of the singer's honesty? . . . As they went by Kläre's house, Sigurd flung a kiss at the closed windows. Then he said: "Say good-bye for me once more."

Leisenbohg nodded. "I will give her your message when she comes back."

Sigurd looked at him in amazement.

"As a matter of fact she has gone away," Leisenbohg continued. "She went off early this morning—without a word to anyone. It is a habit of hers," he added, untruthfully.

"Gone away?" repeated Sigurd, and sank into thought.

Then they were both silent.

Before the departure of the train they embraced like old friends.

That night the Baron wept as he lay in bed, more bitterly than he had done since his childhood. The hour of delight that he had spent with Kläre seemed to him beset by gloom and terror. There had been, he thought, a gleam of madness in her eyes last night. Now he understood. He had obeyed her summons too soon. The shadow of Prince Bedenbruck still had power over her, and Leisenbohg felt that he had possessed Kläre only to lose her for ever.

He wandered about Vienna for a few days without knowing what to do with his days and nights: everything that used to occupy his time—the newspapers, bridge and riding, had become completely indifferent to him. He realised that the meaning of his whole existence depended on Kläre, and even that his relations with other women had their being only as reflections of his passion for her. An eternal grey mist seemed to hang over the city; the people to whom he spoke had hushed voices and stared at him in a strange, almost

treacherous way. One evening he drove to the station and almost mechanically took a ticket to Ischl. There he met acquaintances who asked him unsuspectingly for news of Kläre; he answered in an irritable and offensive tone, and had to fight a duel with one man who did not interest him in the least. He went nonchalantly into the field, heard the bullet whistle past his ear, fired in the air and left Ischl half an hour afterwards. He travelled to Tyrol, the Engadine and the Bernese Oberland, and to Lake Geneva, swam, crossed mountain passes, climbed mountains, and remembered nothing from one day to the next.

One day he received a telegram that had been sent on from Vienna. He opened it with feverish fingers. In it were these words: "If you are my friend, keep your word and come to me quickly, for I need a friend. Sigurd Ölse." Leisenbohg did not doubt for a moment that the contents of this telegram must have some sort of connection with Kläre. He packed as quickly as possible and left Aix, where he then happened to be, at the earliest opportunity. He travelled straight through to Hamburg via Munich, and took the boat via Stavanger to Molde, where he arrived on a fine summer evening. The journey had seemed interminable, and the beauties of the scenery had left him

quite unmoved. Moreover, latterly he had not been able to remember Kläre's voice when she sang, or even her features. It seemed like a year, ten years, since he had left Vienna. But when he saw Sigurd standing on the shore in a white flannel suit and white cap, he felt as though he had seen him only the evening before. And, dishevelled as he was, he smilingly returned Sigurd's greeting from where he was standing on the deck, and walked cheerfully down the gangway.

"I thank you a thousand times for coming so promptly," said Sigurd; and then he added simply: "I'm done for."

The Baron eyed him. Sigurd looked very pale and the hair on his temples had grown astonishingly grey. Over his arm he was carrying a green rug of dimly iridescent material.

"What is it? What has happened?" asked Leisenbohg with a fixed smile.

"I will tell you the whole story," said Sigurd Ölse. It struck the Baron that Sigurd's voice was less resonant than it had been. They drove in a small carriage along the lovely avenue along the shore of the blue sea. Both were silent. Leisenbohg did not dare to ask a question. He stared vacantly at the water which was almost motionless. The strange and (as it

proved) impossible idea of counting the ripples came into his mind; then he looked up into the sky and it seemed as though the stars were dropping slowly down to earth. At last it also occurred to him that a singer, by name Kläre Hell, was wandering somewhere about in the wide world—a fact which did not matter much. Then the carriage stopped with a jerk before a simple white house entirely surrounded by trees and foliage. In the evening they dined upon a verandah that looked out upon the sea. A servant with a stern, and, as he poured out the wine, almost a menacing expression, waited on them. The distant horizon slept under the clear northern light.

"Well?" asked Leisenbohg, in a sudden burst of impatience.

"I am a lost man," said Sigurd Ölse, and stared in front of him.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Leisenbohg in a toneless voice, "and what can I do for you?" he added mechanically.

"Not much. I don't know yet," and he looked beyond the tablecloth, the balustrade, the garden and the garden fence, the road, and the sea into the far distance.

Leisenbohg felt numb within him . . . all manner of notions flashed across his mind . . . what was go-

ing to happen? . . . was Kläre dead? . . . had Sigurd murdered her? . . . thrown her into the sea? . . . Or was Sigurd dead? . . . No, that was impossible—there he was sitting opposite. . . . But why didn't he speak? . . . and suddenly, in an access of terror, Leisenbohg burst out, "Where is Kläre?"

The singer turned slowly towards him. His rather fleshy face began to light up with a sort of inner glow and seemed to smile, unless it was the moonlight playing over it. In any case, at that moment, it seemed to Leisenbohg that the man sitting near him leaning back in his chair with his hands in his pockets and his legs outstretched under the table, and gazing at him with veiled eyes, looked exactly like a Pierrot. The green shawl hung down over the balustrade of the verandah and at that moment seemed to the Baron so like an old acquaintance. . . . But what on earth had this ridiculous old shawl to do with him? Was he dreaming perhaps? . . . he was in Molde; it was all very strange; if he had been sensible he ought really to have telegraphed to the singer from Aix: "What is the matter? What do you want me to do for you, Pierrot?" And he suddenly repeated his earlier question only in a much politer and calmer tone: "Where is Kläre?"

The singer nodded several times. "Yes," he said, "it is something to do with her, of course. Are you a friend of mine?"

Leisenbohg nodded, he felt slightly chilly; a light wind was blowing in from the sea. "I am your friend. What do you want of me?"

"Do you remember the evening I left Vienna, Baron, when we had supper together at the Bristol, and you went with me to the station?"

Leisenbohg nodded once more.

"You had no idea, of course, that Kläre Hell was leaving Vienna in that same train?"

Leisenbohg let his head sink heavily on his chest. . . .

"Nor had I," went on Sigurd. "I saw Kläre for the first time next morning at the station where we stopped for breakfast. She was sitting with Fanny Ringeiser in the dining-room drinking coffee. Her demeanour led me to suppose that this meeting was a fortunate accident. It was not an accident at all."

"Go on," said the Baron, looking at the green shawl which was moving slightly.

"Later on, of course, she confessed that it was not an accident. From that morning we all stayed together, Kläre, Fanny and I. We settled down by one of your

enchanting little Austrian lakes, in a charming house between the shore and the forest, quite by ourselves. We were very happy."

He spoke so slowly that Leisenbohg thought he was going mad.

"Why did he send for me?" he thought. "What does he want of me? Had she confessed? What's the matter with him? Why is he staring at me like that? . . . Why am I sitting here at Molde on a verandah with a Pierrot? Can it be all a dream after all? Perhaps I am still asleep in Kläre's arms. Perhaps that night of ours has not yet ended after all." . . . And he unconsciously opened his eyes wide.

"Will you avenge me?" said Sigurd, suddenly.

"Avenge you? Whatever for? What has happened?" asked the Baron, and his words sounded as if they came from a distance.

"Because she has destroyed me, and I am a lost man."

"Tell me all about it," said Leisenbohg in a hard, dry voice.

"Fanny Ringeiser was with us," Sigurd went on. "She is a good girl, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is a good girl," answered Leisenbohg, and all at once he saw a dim room with furniture cov-

ered in blue velvet and rep curtains where, several hundred years before, he had spoken to Fanny's mother.

"She is rather a stupid girl, is she not?"

"I believe she is," answered the Baron.

"I am sure of it," answered Sigurd. "She did not realise how happy we were." And he was silent for some while.

"Go on," said Leisenbohg, and waited.

"One morning Kläre was still asleep," began Sigurd afresh. "She always slept late into the morning. But I had gone for a walk into the forest. Suddenly Fanny came running up behind me: 'Fly, Herr Ölse, before it is too late; leave this place, for you are in dreadful danger!' Strangely enough, to begin with she absolutely refused to say any more. But I persisted and at last found out what kind of danger it was that she believed to be threatening me. You see, she believed that I could still be saved or she would certainly have told me nothing!"

The green shawl on the balustrade bellied out like a sail, and the lamp flickered a little on the table.

"What did Fanny tell you?" asked Leisenbohg in a rasping tone.

"Do you remember the evening," asked Sigurd, "when we were all at Kläre's house? On the next day Kläre drove out with Fanny to the cemetery, and on the Prince's grave she confided the dreadful secret to her friend."

"The dreadful secret . . .?" stammered the Baron.

"Yes. You know how the Prince died? He was thrown from his horse and lingered for an hour."

"I know."

"Nobody was with him but Kläre."

"That also I know."

"He would see no one but her, and on his deathbed he uttered a curse."

"A curse?"

"A curse. 'Kläre,' said the Prince, 'do not forget me. I shall have no peace in the grave if you forget me.'—'I will never forget you,' replied Kläre.—'Do you swear you will never forget me?'—'I swear it.'—'Kläre, I love you and I must die!' "

"Who is it speaking?" cried the Baron.

"I am," said Sigurd; "I am telling you what Fanny said; Fanny told me what Kläre said, and Kläre told her what the Prince said. Don't you understand?"

Leisenbohg listened with strained attention: it

seemed as though he could hear the voice of the dead Prince ringing out from the triply-sealed coffin into the night.

"'Kläre, I love you, and I must die! You are so young, and I must die. . . . And after me another man will come. . . . I know it will be so, another man will hold you in his arms and be happy with you . . . he must not be—he shall not be—I lay my curse on him, do you hear, Kläre? I curse him!—The first man that kisses those lips and holds that body in his arms when I am gone shall go down to hell! Kläre, Heaven hears the curses of dying men. Beware—and let him beware; he shall go down to hell in madness, misery and death! Woe be to that man—woe!'"

Sigurd, from whose mouth the dead man's voice thundered out, had got up from his chair and stood, a tall heavy figure in his white flannel suit, staring into the clear night. The green shawl slipped down from the balustrade into the garden. An icy chill came over the Baron; he felt as though his whole body was growing stiff; he would gladly have cried out, but though he opened his mouth wide no sound came . . . in a flash he was back again in Frau Eisenstein, the singing teacher's, little room where he had seen Kläre for the first time. On the stage stood a Pierrot, and

shouted out: 'With this curse on his lips Prince Bedenbruck died, and the unhappy man in whose arms she lay, the wretch upon whom the curse must be fulfilled, is I—I!'"

Then the stage collapsed with a loud crash and sank before Leisenbohg's eyes into the sea. But he, without a word, fell backwards with his chair, like a marionette.

Sigurd leapt up and shouted for help. Two servants came, picked up the unconscious man and laid him out in an armchair that stood beside the table; one of them went for a doctor, and the other brought some water and vinegar. Sigurd rubbed the Baron's forehead and temples, but he did not stir. Then the doctor came and began his examination. It did not last long. When he had finished he said: "This gentleman is dead."

Sigurd Ölse was much upset, asked the doctor to make the necessary arrangements and left the verandah. He walked through the drawing-room, went upstairs, entered his bedroom, lit a lamp and hurriedly wrote the following words: "Kläre! I found your telegram waiting for me in Molde where I had fled without stopping on the way. I will confess that I did not believe you; I thought that you were trying to set

my mind at rest by a lie. Forgive me; I no longer doubt you. Baron von Leisenbohg has been here. I asked him to come, but I did not question him because as an honourable man he would have had to lie. I had an ingenious idea. I told him about the dead Prïnce's curse. The effect was amazing. The Baron fell backwards as he sat, and died on the spot."

Sigurd paused for a moment, looked very serious and seemed to be reflecting. Then he took up his stand in the middle of the room and began to sing. At first his voice sounded timid and subdued, but gradually it grew clearer and rang out strong and splendid into the night—so powerfully at last that it seemed full of the thunder of the sea. A satisfied smile spread over Sigurd's features and he breathed a deep sigh of relief. Once more he sat down at the writing-table, and added the following words to his letter:

"Darling Kläre! Forgive me—all is well again. I shall be with you in three days. . . ."

THE STRANGER

THE STRANGER

WHEN ALBERT AWOKE AT SIX O'CLOCK IN THE morning the bed beside him was empty and his wife was gone. On the small table lay a note in her handwriting. Albert reached out for it and read the following words: "My dear, I woke up earlier than you. Good-bye. I am going. Whether I shall ever come back I do not know. Farewell. Katherina."

Albert let the note drop on to the white coverlet and shook his head. Whether she came back to-day or not—it did not really matter. Neither the tone nor the contents of the letter surprised him. It had merely come a little earlier than he expected. His happiness had lasted just a fortnight. Well, he was ready.

Slowly he got out of bed, put on his dressing gown, walked across to the window and opened it. The city of Innsbruck lay at his feet in the peaceful still morning light, and far away a confusion of rocky heights towered up into the blue light. Albert folded his arms

and stared into the distance. He reflected that full foreknowledge, and even a set determination, did not lighten the burden of man's fate, though they made it easier to face. He hesitated for a while. And yet what had he to wait for now? Would it not be best to make an end at once? Was not the curiosity that tortured him a betrayal of his resolution? His fate must be fulfilled. It had been decided two long years ago at a dance when he felt the breath of her mysterious lips brush past his cheeks.

He remembered how that night he had gone back home with his friend Vincent. He must think of everything that Vincent then had told him; and the gentle tones of that long-distant warning rang once more in his ears. Vincent knew all sorts of things about Katherina and her family. The father had been colonel of an artillery regiment, ennobled during the Bosnian campaign, and had fallen by a rebel's bullet. Her brother had been a lieutenant of cavalry, and had quickly gone through his inheritance; later on the mother had sacrificed her whole fortune to save her son from disaster; but this did not serve him for long, and soon after the young officer shot himself.

About that time a Baron Maasburg, who passed for Katherina's betrothed, began his visits to the house.

This was attributed not merely to the poor circumstances of the family, which then came to light, but also to a remarkable scene that had taken place during the funeral. Katherina had fallen sobbing into the arms of a brother officer of the dead youth whom she did not know, just as though he had been a friend of hers, or her fiancé. A year later she was seized by violent infatuation for the organist Banetti. He left Vienna before she had ever spoken to him. One morning she told her mother that she had dreamt that Banetti had come into her room, played a fugue of Bach on the piano, then fallen backwards on to the floor, dead, while the ceiling opened and the piano floated up to Heaven. On the very same day they heard that Banetti had thrown himself from the church tower of a little Lombard town, into the graveyard, and was found dead lying at the foot of a cross.

Soon afterwards Katherina began to show signs of melancholia, which gradually increased to a state of utter prostration; only her mother's insistent opposition and her firm faith in Katherina's recovery prevented the doctor from sending her to an institution. For a whole year Katherina spent the daytime alone and in silence; but at night she sometimes got out of bed and sang simple songs as she used to do. Gradu-

ally, and to the doctor's great astonishment, she awoke out of her melancholy. She seemed to have come back to life, and even to pleasure. Soon she began to accept invitations, at first only among a few friends; then the circle of her acquaintance began to widen, and when Albert got to know her at the White Cross Ball she seemed to him so particularly self-possessed that he hardly felt able to believe his friend's stories on their way home.

Albert von Webeling, who had not previously gone about the world much, found it quite easy, thanks to the reputation of his family, and his position as Under-Secretary in a Ministry, to get admittance to Katherina's circle. Every meeting deepened his attraction to her. Katherina had quite a simple way with her, but her height, and more especially her characteristic—almost queenly—way of inclining her head when she listened to anyone, gave her a distinction all her own. She did not say much, and when she was in company her eyes often seemed as though they were looking into a distance that others could not reach. She treated younger men with a certain indifference, and much preferred to talk to older men of rank or reputation. And when another year had passed after she had made Albert's acquaintance, rumour

bethrothed her to a Count Rummingshaus who had just come back from a journey of exploration in Thibet and Turkestan. Then Albert knew that the day on which Katherina gave another man her hand in marriage would be the last day of his life, and he, whose existence had flowed so peacefully for thirty years, at one stroke became acquainted with all the perils and the madness into which a violent passion can drive the most cautious of men. He was utterly convinced of his unworthiness of Katherina. He had a moderate income and could have lived a very comfortable life as a bachelor, but he could not expect wealth from either side of his family. A secure, but certainly not a very significant, career stood before him. He dressed with the greatest care, without ever looking really smart, talked with a certain cleverness, though he never had anything special to say, and everyone was glad, though not overjoyed, to see him. And so he felt that a creature like Katherina, mysterious and seemingly from another world, would have to demean herself far if he were to win her, and that in any case it was her privilege to make him pay highly for a happiness that he did not deserve. But as he was ready to make any sacrifice, he gradually began to think he was growing worthy of her. One

morning he heard that the Count had gone away to Galicia without having declared himself, and with a determination that was quite unlike his usual self he considered the right moment had come, and went off to see Katherina.

How far away that hour seemed now!

He saw before him the long low-vaulted room on the Schottenhof, with its old well-polished furniture; he saw the solitary dark red armchair standing in the window; the piano with some music above the open keyboard; the round mahogany table and on it the album bound in mother-of-pearl and the card tray of Alt-Meissner porcelain. And he remembered how he had looked down into the broad square which was just then full of people coming out of the Palm Sunday Mass in the Schotten Church opposite. While the bells were ringing, Katherina and her mother came out of the next room and were not so astonished at his visit as he really expected. She listened to him kindly and accepted his proposal without much emotion, as though he had come to invite her to a ball. The mother, wearing the continuously benevolent smile of those hard of hearing, sat silent in the corner of the sofa, and from time to time raised her small black silk fan to her ear. During the whole conversa-

tion in that cool room, so full of sunlit quiet, Albert had the sensation that he had come to a place that for a long time had been ravaged by violent storms, and now breathed a great longing for peace. And when, later on, he walked down the grey staircase, he had no blissful sensation of a desire fulfilled, but merely the consciousness that he had entered upon a wonderful, indeed, but uncertain and dark epoch of his existence. And, as on that Sunday morning, he wandered from street to street, through gardens and avenues, with the sky of spring above him, and so many gay and careless people passed him by, he felt that thenceforward he belonged to them no more, that a destiny of another and a stranger kind had begun to rule him.

Every evening he had sat up there in that vaulted room. Sometimes Katherina would sing in a pleasant but almost wholly expressionless voice, simple, mostly Italian, folk-songs, which he accompanied on the piano. Then he would often stand with her at the window until late in the evening looking down into the quiet square, where the trees were growing green and beginning to blossom. On fine afternoons he constantly met her in the Belvedere garden: she had usually been sitting there for some time, watching the

children play. When she saw him coming she would get up, and then they walked together up and down the sunny gravel paths. In the early days he often told her about his former life, his boyhood in his parents' house at Gratz, his student days in Vienna, his holidays in the summer, and as he searched his memory he was only surprised how shadowy and formless his earlier life now seemed. Perhaps this was partly because Katherina did not show the slightest interest in all these things.

Strange things happened, that might be without importance, but at any rate were never explained. One day, for instance, about noon, Albert met his betrothed on the Stephansplatz in the company of an elegant gentleman dressed in mourning, whom he had never seen before. Albert stopped short, but Katherina greeted him coolly, and without more ado walked on with the strange man. Albert followed her for a little, the gentleman got into a carriage that was waiting for him at a street corner and drove off. Katherina went home. When Albert asked her that evening who the man was, she looked at him with astonishment, uttered a Polish name he had never heard before and departed to her own room for the rest of the evening. Another time, one evening, she kept him waiting and waiting

and never came. At last she appeared, as ten o'clock was striking, with a bunch of wild flowers in hand, and told him she had been into the country and gone to sleep in a field. She threw the flowers out of the window. Once she went to the Künstlerhaus with Albert and stood with him for a long time in front of a picture representing a green hilly landscape with white clouds above it. A few days afterward she talked about the place, as though she had really wandered over those hills as a child and in the company of her dead brother. Albert at first thought she was not serious, but he gradually noticed that the picture had become for her a living part of her experience; and then he knew that his surprise was beginning to change into feelings of grief and horror. But as the essence of her slipped further from his grasp, the more despairingly insistent his desire cried out for her.

Sometimes he succeeded in making her speak of her youth. But all she described to him—stories of real events and confessions of far-off dreams—seemed to hover in the same dim radiance, so that Albert did not know who or what had most vividly impressed her: the organist who had thrown himself down from the church tower, the young Duke

of Modena who had once ridden past her in the Prater, or a youth by Van Dyck whose picture she had seen as a girl in the Liechtenstein Gallery. And in that half-light of her being she seemed still to be reaching after unknown or uncertain purposes, and Albert suspected that he meant no more to her than someone who might offer her his arm for a turn round the room at a reception. And as he made every effort to extricate her from this hazy sort of existence, he began at last to feel that the narcotic breath of her personality had cast a spell on him; he was gradually thinking in her fashion, and even behaving as she did; he was beginning to deny the plain necessities of daily life.

It began by his buying things for their future housekeeping that far exceeded his means; and he sent his betrothed costly jewels. The day before his wedding he bought a small house in a garden suburb which had taken his fancy as he walked past it one day, and the same evening he gave her a gift of a deed transferring it to her absolute possession. But she took it all with the same friendliness and composure with which she had accepted his hand. She certainly thought him richer than he was. At the outset he had of course intended to talk to her about his financial position. He

put it off from day to day because the words would not come; but finally the time arrived when he realised that any discussion of such matters was unnecessary. For when she spoke about her future, she did not do so like one who sees an appointed road leading into the distance: she did so as though all possibilities would be open to her then as before, and nothing in her behaviour suggested any inward or outward obligation. So one day Albert knew that a happiness uncertain and short lay before him, but he also knew that what might happen to him when Katherina had disappeared would be devoid of any meaning. For an existence without her had become completely unthinkable for him, and it was his firm intention simply to leave the world as soon as he lost Katherina. In this certainty he found his only foothold in this time of confusion and desire, but it served him well.

On the morning when Albert fetched Katherina for the wedding, she was just as strange to him as on the evening when he had first got to know her. She became his without passion and without resistance. They travelled together in the mountains. They drove through summer-like valleys that broadened and then grew narrow; they walked on the sunny shores of rippling lakes and wandered on forgotten paths

through whispering woodlands. They stood at many a window, looked down on to the silent streets of magic cities, and gazed beyond them along mysterious rivers towards the silent mountains over which pale clouds dissolved in mist. And they talked about the daily affairs of life like any other young couple, walked arm in arm, lingered in front of buildings and shop windows, made plans, smiled, clinked brimming glasses, and sank—cheek upon cheek—into happy sleep. But time and time again she left him, in some half-lit hotel dining-room that glimmered with all the horror of the unknown, or on some stone bench in a garden among people who were enjoying the fragrance of a lovely day, or in some lofty hall in front of the blackened portrait of a knight or a Madonna; and he never knew when she would come back, or whether she would come back at all. For, insistent and inevitable as the beating of his heart, was the feeling within him that nothing had changed since the first day, that she was as free as ever, while he was dedicated to her.

Thus it was that her disappearance early that morning after a fortnight's honeymoon and her strange letter had only shaken him; they had not really surprised him. To search for her would, he thought, be degrad-

ing to both of them. Who or whatever had taken her from him—a caprice, a dream, or a living person—was utterly indifferent to him. All he knew and all he needed to know was that she was no longer his. Perhaps it was really for the best that the inevitable had come so early. His fortune had been reduced to next to nothing by his purchase of the house, and they could not both live on his small salary. It would have been quite impossible for him to talk to her about economies and the ordinary cares of daily life. For an instant it flashed through his mind that he would leave her. His gaze fell on the coverlet on which lay her note. A fleeting idea came to him to write a brief word of explanation on the blank side of the paper. But he was perfectly well aware that such a message could have not the slightest interest for Katherina, and he dismissed the notion. He opened his valise, put his small revolver in his pocket, and decided to wander somewhere outside the city, and there, with decency and without inconvenience to anyone, accomplish his deed.

The clear dark-blue light of a hot morning of summer, come before its time, lay upon the city. Albert went straight out. He was scarcely a hundred yards from the hotel when he saw Katherina's figure in front

of him. She held her grey silk parasol in her hand and was walking slowly along the street. Albert's first impulse was to turn off into another street, but a power that was stronger than all his resolutions and reflections forced him to follow her so as to make certain of what, a minute before, he believed he could face with indifference. He actually felt rather afraid that she might turn and discover him. She took the road to the *Hof* garden, and he kept himself at a careful distance. She had soon reached the *Hof* Church, the door of which stood open. She went in. Albert followed her after a few moments. He remained standing near the entrance in deep shadow. He watched Katherina walking slowly down the middle aisle between the dark statues of the heroes and queens. Suddenly she stopped. Albert moved from where he had been standing and slipped into a niche behind the great cenotaph of the emperor Maximilian that towers up in the centre of the Church. Katherina stood motionless before the statue of Theodoric. With his left arm supported on his sword, the bronze hero gazed before him with eyes that seemed eternal. His attitude was one of royal weariness as though he were conscious at once of the greatness and the futility of his deeds, and as though all his pride were sinking into sadness.

Katherina stood before the statue and looked steadfastly into the face of the King of the Goths. Albert stayed a little while in his concealment, then he ventured forth. She must have heard his footsteps but she did not turn; she stood where she was as though spell-bound. People came into the church, foreigners with red guide books, and stood talking near her and behind her; she did not hear. Then for a time the place was quieter, but Katherina stood as before, herself like a statue in her immobility. Another quarter of an hour, and another, passed. Katherina did not stir.

Albert went. At the doorway he turned once more: and then he saw that Katherina had gone up to the statue and was touching the bronze foot with her lips. Albert hurried away, smiling. An idea came to him that seemed to stir his heart, and made him glad. He had something more to do for his beloved before he went away. He made his way to an art shop in the Bahnhofstrasse: there he enquired whether a natural-sized bronze reproduction of the Theodoric could be made. As accident would have it, just such a one had been finished a month before: the English lord who had ordered it was dead and his heirs refused to take it. Albert asked the price. It was a sum just about equalling the remainder of his fortune. Albert gave his

Vienna address with exact instructions that a reliable agent of the firm was to be sent to superintend its erection in the garden of his villa. Then he departed, hurried through the city, took the road through the suburb of Wilten towards Igls, and shot himself in a small wood, just as the sun had reached the zenith.

Katherina did not return to Vienna until a few weeks after this occurrence. In the meantime Albert had been laid away in the family vault at Gratz. On the evening of her arrival Katherina stood for a while in the garden in front of the statue, which had been admirably placed under some tall trees. Then she went to her room and wrote a long letter to Verona, Poste Restante, to one Andrea Geraldini. Such (so he said) was the name of a gentleman who had followed her from the *Hof* Church when she left Theodoric the Great, and whose child she bore under her heart. Whether it was his right name she never knew; for she received no answer.

THE GREEK DANCING-GIRL

THE GREEK DANCING-GIRL

PEOPLE MAY SAY WHAT THEY LIKE: I DON'T BELIEVE that Frau Mathilde Samodeski died of heart failure; I know better. And I am not going inside the house from which they are to carry her out to-day to the rest for which she longed: I have no wish to see the man who knows as well as I do why she died, to shake his hand and say nothing.

I shall take another road: it means a long walk, but the autumn day is fine and still, and it does me good to be alone. I shall soon be standing by the garden-fence behind which I saw Mathilde for the last time in the spring. The shutters of the villa will all be closed, red leaves will be lying on the gravel path, and somewhere I shall see the glitter of white marble through the trees—the marble out of which the Greek dancing-girl was chiselled.

That evening is much in my mind to-day. It seems now almost like a dispensation that I decided at the last moment to accept the Wartenheimers' invitation,

as in the course of the year I had so entirely lost my taste for social activities. Perhaps it was the warm breeze that came down of an evening from the hills into the city, and tempted me into the country. Besides, it was to be an open-air party, a house-warming for the Wartenheimers' villa, and I did not need to fear that it would be any sort of formal function. It is also strange that as I drove out of town I scarcely thought of the possibility of meeting Frau Mathilde, although I knew that Herr von Wartenheimer had bought the Greek dancing-girl from Samodeski for his villa; and I also knew that Frau von Wartenheimer had fallen in love with the sculptor, as indeed most women did.

But apart from this, I might well have thought about Mathilde, for, in the times of her girlhood, I had spent many charming hours in her company. There was more especially a summer on Lake Geneva, seven years ago, exactly a year before her engagement, that I shall not easily forget. It seems, indeed, as if, in spite of my grey hairs, I must have imagined many things, for when she married Samodeski a year later I felt a certain disappointment and was entirely convinced—or actually hoped—that she would not be happy with him. I did not see Mathilde again until

the party given by Gregor Samodeski, soon after his return from the honeymoon, in his studio on the Gusshausgasse—it was an amusing affair at which all the guests had to appear in Japanese or Chinese costumes. She greeted me quite unaffectedly, and her whole demeanour gave the impression of repose and cheerfulness. But later on, while she was in conversation with others, I more than once caught a strange expression in her eyes, and after a little reflection I clearly understood its meaning. It said: "My dear friend, you think that he married me for my money, you think he does not love me, you think I am not happy—but you are wrong. You are utterly and entirely wrong. Look how gay I am and how my eyes are shining."

I met her a few times after that, but they were only casual meetings. I once ran across her on a journey: I dined with her and her husband in a station restaurant and he told me all sorts of entertaining stories which did not really make me laugh. I spoke to her once in a theatre—she was then with her mother who is really even more beautiful than she is. . . . God knows where Herr Samodeski was on that occasion. And last winter I saw her on the Prater: it was a clear, cold winter day. She was walking with her little girl over the snow under the bare chestnut trees. The carriage

was following slowly. I happened to be on the other side of the road, and I did not cross it. Probably I was thinking about other matters, and I was no longer particularly interested in Mathilde. And to-day I should very likely not be thinking about her and her sudden death, had it not been for that last encounter at the Wartenheimers'. I recall that evening now with a strange and even painful clarity, just like those old days on Lake Geneva.

It was getting dark when I got to the house. The guests were strolling about the paths. I greeted my host and a few acquaintances. From somewhere came the sound of music from a small chamber orchestra, concealed behind the trees. I soon came upon a small pool, backed by a semi-circle of tall trees; in the centre of it, on a dark pedestal, so that she seemed poised above the water, gleamed the Greek dancing-girl: she was, too, rather theatrically lit up by electric rays from the house. I remembered the sensation it had made in the Secession Exhibit the year before: I must confess it even made an impression on me, though I greatly dislike Samodeski, and though I have a strange feeling that it is not really he who creates the beautiful things that he somehow manages to produce, but something else that is within him, some inexplic-

able, blazing, even dæmonic force, that will quite certainly be extinguished when he is no longer young and loved. I believe there are a great many artists of this kind, and for some time this circumstance has filled me with a certain satisfaction.

I met Mathilde near the pool. She was walking on the arm of a young man who looked like a Korps student, and introduced himself as a connection of the house. The three of us fell into a pleasant conversation and strolled up and down the garden, which now began to be lit up with flickering fairy-lights. The lady of the house approached us on the arm of Samodeski. We all stood for a while, and, to my own astonishment, I said a few very appreciative words to the sculptor about his Greek dancing-girl. I was really not responsible for what I said: there was a genial, cheerful atmosphere about, as often happens on such an evening in spring. People who otherwise regard each other with complete indifference are found exchanging the heartiest greetings, and others who are already conscious of a certain bond of sympathy are moved to pour out their hearts in confidences. For instance, when I sat down on a bench and lit a cigarette, a gentleman came up to me whom I only knew very slightly, and who suddenly began to

sing the praises of people who make so agreeable a use of their wealth as our hosts. I was entirely of his opinion, although I generally regard Herr von Wartenheimer as a complete and utter snob. I then began, quite without cause, to expound to my companion my views on modern sculpture, about which I understand very little, and in any case they would certainly have been without the slightest interest for him, but under the influence of that seductive spring evening he agreed with them enthusiastically. Later on I met my host's nieces, who thought the party extremely romantic, mainly because the lights were glittering between the leaves and there was a sound of music in the distance. At the moment we were standing near the band, but I still thought the observation quite sensible, so deeply was I under the common spell of that spring evening.

Supper was laid at small tables which, so far as space permitted, were arranged on the large terrace with an overflow into the adjoining dining-room. The three great glass doors stood wide open. I sat at a table in the open air with one of the nieces; on my other side was Mathilde with the gentleman who looked like a Korps student, but was in fact a bank official and an officer of the reserve. Opposite us, but in

the dining-room, sat Samodeski between the lady of the house and some other lovely woman whom I did not know. He kissed his hand to his wife with an air of mocking defiance, she nodded to him and smiled. Without quite knowing why, I looked at him rather closely. He was certainly a handsome fellow with his steel-blue eyes and his long black pointed beard, which he would sometimes smooth against his chin with two fingers of his left hand. But I also think that never in my life have I seen a man so enveloped, as one might say, by ardent words and looks and gestures as on that evening. At first it seemed as though he was merely tolerating all this adoration. But I soon saw, by his manner of gently whispering to those women, his intolerably triumphant expression, and especially by the excited gaiety of his companions, that this apparently harmless conversation was fed by a secret fire.

Mathilde must, of course, have noticed this just as clearly as I did, but she appeared to be quite unperturbed as she talked first to her neighbour and then to me. Gradually she turned her whole attention to me, enquired after various external circumstances of my life, and asked me to tell her about my trip to Athens the previous year. Then she began to talk about her little daughter, who had begun to show a

remarkable talent for singing Schubert's songs by ear; about her parents who had bought a little house in Heitzing for their old age; about some old church tapestries that she had discovered in Salzburg the year before, and about a hundred other things. But under the surface of all this something quite different had come between us: a silent, bitter conflict: she was trying by her composure to convince me of the serenity of her happiness, and I was struggling not to believe her. I could not help thinking once more of that Chinese-Japanese evening, when she had tried to do this once before. This time she really felt that she was making little impression on my misgivings, and that she must think out some special means of overcoming them. And so it occurred to her to call my attention to the two lovely women's insinuating and affectionate manner to her husband, and she began to talk about his popularity among women as if, like a good comrade, she ought without uneasiness or suspicion to take pleasure in it as she did in his good looks and his genius. But the more she tried to appear contented and at peace, the deeper were the shadows that moved across her brow. When, on one occasion, she raised her glass to Samodeski, her hand trembled. She tried to conceal and overcome it, with the result

that for a moment or two not only her hand but her arm—her whole body—was so paralysed that I was almost afraid. She recovered herself, threw a sidelong glance at me, clearly noticed that she was on the point of losing her game at last, and said suddenly, as though in a last despairing attempt:

"I'm certain you think I'm jealous."

And before I had time to answer she added quickly:

"Oh, many people think so. At first Gregor thought so himself."

She intentionally spoke quite loudly, and the people at the other table could have heard every word.

"Ah well," she said, looking across into the room, "with a husband like that, handsome and famous . . . and not being generally considered very pretty oneself. . . . Oh, you needn't answer. . . . I know I've got a little prettier since I had my baby."

She was possibly right, but for her husband—I was quite convinced of that—the distinction of her features had never had much meaning, and as for her figure—with the loss of her girlish slimness her sole charm for him had probably disappeared. Of course, I babbled out some hurried words of agreement: she seemed pleased, and went on with increasing confidence:

"But I haven't the slightest talent for jealousy. I

did not at once realise this myself. I gradually came to understand it, and more especially a few years ago in Paris. . . . You knew we were there, of course?"

I remembered.

"It was then that Gregor made the busts of Princess La Hire and of the Minister Chocquet, and many others. We had such a lovely life there, just like young people . . . well, of course, we're both still young . . . I mean like a pair of lovers, though we did go out into the world from time to time. . . . We sometimes called upon the Austrian Ambassador, and visited the La Hires, and a few others. But in general we didn't go about much in Society. We lived, in fact, up in Montmartre, in a rather shabby house where Gregor also had his studio. I assure you that many of the young artists we went about with had no notion that we were married. We ran about everywhere together. I've often sat late into the night with him in the Café Athènes, with Léandre, Carabin, and many others. And we went about sometimes with all sorts of women that I probably should not have cared to know in Vienna . . . though when all is said and done . . ." She threw a quick glance across at Frau von Wartenheimer, and continued: "And many of them were very pretty. Sometimes we had with us Henri Chabran's last

mistress, who always wore black since his death and had a new lover every week—but they all had to wear deep mourning while they were with her—she insisted on that. . . . Strange people they were that we got to know. You can imagine that the women ran after my husband just as much as everywhere else: it was truly laughable. But as I was always with him—or at any rate most of the time—they did not make any open advances, especially as I passed as his mistress. . . . Yes, if they had known that I was only his wife . . . ! And so one day a strange thing happened to me, that you would certainly never have believed, and indeed, speaking candidly, I am still astonished at my courage." She stared in front of her and spoke more softly than before. "Besides it is possible that it is in a way connected with something—well, you shall hear.

"For some weeks I had known that I was about to have a child, and I was unbelievably happy. At first I was not merely gayer but, strangely enough, even more lively than ever before. . . . Well, I must tell you that one fine evening I had put on men's clothes and gone out with Gregor in search of adventures. Of course, I first made him promise that he would do exactly as he liked . . . otherwise there

would have been no sense in the whole affair. I looked simply splendid—you would not have recognised me . . . no one did. A friend of Gregor's, a certain Léonce Albert, a young painter, a hump-back, called for us that evening. It was lovely weather . . . May . . . quite warm, and I was as shameless as you can think! I had calmly taken off my overcoat—a very smart yellow overcoat—and was carrying it over my arm . . . just as men do. . . . It was indeed beginning to get dark . . . we dined in a little restaurant on the outer Boulevard, then we went on to the 'Roulotte,' where Legay was then singing, and Montoya . . . 'Tu t'en iras les pieds devant . . .' You heard it here lately in the Wiedener Theatre, didn't you?"

At that moment Mathilde threw a quick glance across at her husband, who did not notice it. It was as though she were taking leave of him for a long time. Then, with ever-increasing intensity, she seemed to plunge into the sequel.

"In the 'Roulotte,'" she said, "was a very elegant lady, who was sitting just in front of us: she flirted with Gregor, and in such a way! . . . Really you couldn't imagine anything more shameless. I shall never understand how her husband did not strangle her on the spot. I would have done so. I think she was a

duchess. . . . Now, don't laugh, she was certainly a lady of the great world, in spite of her behaviour . . . one can always tell. . . . And I really wanted Gregor to play up . . . of course I did! . . . I should have liked to know how these things start. . . . I wanted him to write her a note, or do whatever he would have done before he was married. Yes, I did want him to, though it might have got him into trouble. I suppose it's our terrible feminine curiosity. . . . But Gregor, I am thankful to say, was not interested. We soon went straight out again—out into the lovely May night, and Léonce was still with us. He quite lost his heart to me that evening, and, contrary to his habit, was positively gallant. He was ordinarily very shy—owing to his appearance. . . . I said, 'It must be the effect of the yellow overcoat that has gone to your head.' And we strolled gaily on like three students.

"Then came the real adventure. We went into the Moulin Rouge which was part of the programme. Something had to happen some time. . . . We had had no experiences until then, except that a woman had spoken to me—to me, can you believe it?—on the street. But that was nothing. We got to the Moulin Rouge about one. You probably know what the place

is like: I had really thought it was worse. . . . At first nothing happened whatever, and it really looked as if the whole escapade would come to nothing. I began to get peevish. 'Don't be childish,' said Gregor: 'you don't suppose they're going to fall at our feet the moment we come in?' He said 'our' out of courtesy to Léonce: there was not much chance of anyone falling at Léonce's feet. But just as we were all seriously thinking about going home, the affair took a turn. A person came up to me—yes, it was really to me—who had happened to pass us several times already. . . . She had quite a serious air and looked rather different from most of the women present. She was not at all showily dressed—in white, entirely in white. I had noticed that she did not so much as answer two or three men who spoke to her, but simply walked on without condescending to notice them. She just watched the ballet, quietly and with a detached sort of interest. Léonce, at my request, asked some men he knew whether they had ever met the beautiful creature anywhere, and one of them remembered that he had met her the winter before at one of the Thursday balls in the Latin Quarter. Léonce then went up to her as she stood a little way off, and she answered him.

He then brought her up to us, and we all sat down at a small table and drank champagne. Gregor paid no attention to her whatever—she might not have been there at all. He talked to me and me alone. . . . That seemed especially to provoke her. She became gayer, more talkative, more unconstrained, and gradually slipped into telling us her entire life-story. The things that such a poor soul can—or perhaps must—go through! One reads of it so often, but when one hears it as a piece of reality from someone sitting near by it seems so strange. I still remember a great deal of it. Someone had betrayed and abandoned her when she was fifteen. Then she became a model, and after that she walked on at a small theatre. The things she told us about the Director! . . . I should have gone out there and then if I had not been already a little excited by champagne. . . . Then she fell in with a medical student who was working at anatomy, and she often came to fetch him from the dissecting-room . . . or more often stayed with him there. . . . No, really, I can't repeat what she told us. The medical student, of course, left her. That, she decided, should be the end—yes, really! And she tried to commit suicide. She was very amusing . . . when she described it. I can still hear her voice.

. . . It did not sound so common as it was. And she pulled her dress aside and showed us a little reddish scar over her left breast. And as we were all looking very gravely at the scar she suddenly said—no, she screamed—to my husband: 'Kiss it!' As I have already told you, Gregor had taken no notice of her. Even while she was telling her story, he hardly listened; he stared about the room, smoked cigarettes, and now when she called out to him he hardly smiled. However, I nudged him, and bothered him—I was really rather tipsy, and it was the most extraordinary experience in my life. And whether he liked it or not, he had to . . . at any rate he had to make as though he had touched the place with his lips. After that we were gayer and madder than ever. I have never laughed so much as I did that evening, and I never knew why. And I never could have believed it possible that a female creature—and such a one—could fall so madly in love with a man in the course of an hour as that woman did with Gregor. Her name was Madeleine."

I don't know whether Frau Mathilde spoke the name louder on purpose—in any case it seemed as though her husband heard it, for he looked across at us: he looked at his wife in an ordinary sort of

way, but our eyes met, and so remained fixed for a space, but without any special understanding. Then he suddenly smiled at his wife, she nodded back, he went on talking to his neighbours, and she turned again to me.

"I can't, of course, remember everything that Madeleine told us later," said she; "it was all so weird. But I will be frank: there was one moment when I was a little put out. That was when Madeleine took my husband's hand and kissed it. But it was soon over. For at that moment, you see, I could not help thinking of our child. And then I felt how indissolubly I and Gregor were bound together: what was the rest? —shadows, unreality, or make-believe, like that evening. And all was well again. Then we went out and sat until dawn in a café on the Boulevard. There I heard Madeleine asking my husband to go home with her. He simply laughed at her. And then, to bring the joke to a good and, in a certain sense, a profitable end —you know what egoists all artists are, where their art is concerned at any rate—well, in a word, he told her he was a sculptor, and asked her to come and see him soon as he would like to model her. And she replied: 'If you're a sculptor, I'll hang myself: but I'll come.' "

Mathilde was silent. But I have never seen the eyes of any woman express—or conceal—so much pain. Then, when she had braced herself to tell what still remained, she went on: "Gregor wanted to insist that I should be in his studio next day. Yes, he actually proposed that I should stay hidden behind a curtain when she came. Well, there are women, many *women,* I know, who would have accepted. But, I think, either one believes or one does not . . . and I have decided to believe. Am I not right?" And she looked at me with her great questioning eyes. I merely nodded, and she went on. "Madeleine, of course, came the next day and then came often . . . as many others came before her, and many others have come since. . . . And she was one of the loveliest, you may believe me. You yourself stood before her to-day in admiration, out there by the pool."

"The Dancing-girl?"

"Yes, Madeleine was the model for her. And now do you suppose that I should have been suspicious in such circumstances, or in others like them? Should I not have turned both our lives into a torment if I had? I am very glad that I have no inclination to be jealous."

Someone was standing in the central door and had

started proposing our host's health in a speech that was no doubt very witty, for the company was laughing heartily. But I was watching Mathilde, who was listening as little as I was. And I saw how she looked across at her husband with an expression that revealed not only an unending love, but also wore a mask of unshakable faith, as though it were truly her highest duty by no means to trouble him in the enjoyment of the life that was his. And he acknowledged her look—smiling and unperturbed, although he, of course, knew as well as I that she was suffering, and had long been suffering like an animal.

And that is why I don't believe the story of the heart attack. I got to know Mathilde so well that evening, and I am quite convinced, just as from first to last she played the happy wife before her husband, while he deceived her and drove her into madness, so at the end she put up this performance of a natural death, when she threw her life away because she could bear it no longer. And he accepted this last sacrifice, also, as though it had been his due.

I was standing now before the garden-fence. . . . The shutters were closed and barred. White and as though enchanted stood the little villa in the half-

light, and there was the marble glittering between the red boughs.

Perhaps, after all, I may be unjust to Samodeski. He is fundamentally so stupid that he really does not suspect the truth. But it is sad to think that there was no greater joy for Mathilde in her death than to know that her last divine deception had succeeded.

Or might I after all be wrong, and it was natural death? . . . No, I won't allow myself to be deprived of the right to hate the man whom Mathilde had so loved. That will probably be for a long while my only solace.

THE PROPHECY

THE PROPHECY

I

NOT FAR FROM BOTZEN, ON SOME RISING GROUND, almost buried in woods and hardly visible from the main road, lies the small property of the Baron von Schottenegg. A friend of mine who had been practising as a doctor in Botzen for the past ten years, and whom I met there again in the autumn, had introduced me to the Baron. The latter was then fifty years of age and an amateur in several arts. He composed a little, played the violin and the piano really well, and could draw quite tolerably. But his most serious pursuit in his earlier days had been acting. It seemed that as a young man he had for several years gone about the Empire with a small touring company under an assumed name. But, from whatever cause, whether his father's persistent opposition, insufficient talent, or bad luck, the Baron had given up his career quite early; very shortly afterwards he had followed the

family tradition and entered the service of the State, and there he had remained for the past twenty years as a faithful, if unenthusiastic, official. But when he resigned at scarcely more than forty years of age, immediately after his father's death, it then became clear for the first time how deeply attached he still was to his youthful pursuit. He had the villa on the slope of the Guntschnaberg put in order, and then gathered round him, especially in summer and autumn, an ever-increasing crowd of guests, both men and women, who performed all sorts of plays that were easy to act.

His wife, who came of an old Tyrol middle-class family, took little real interest in artistic matters, but she was clever and had a friendly affection for her husband, whose hobby she regarded with a touch of sarcasm, though quite good-naturedly, for the Baron's interest fell in with her own social inclinations. The company one met at the castle might, to fastidious observers, have seemed a little mixed, but guests whose birth and breeding might otherwise have disposed them to be exclusive took no offence at such a casual assemblage which seemed sufficiently justified by their common interest. In any case the name and reputation of their host and hostess banished any suspicion of any freedom of behaviour. Among many others,

whom I can no longer call to mind, I met at the castle a young count attached to the Innsbruck provincial administration, a Jäger officer from Riva, a captain of the General Staff with his wife and daughter, an opera singer from Berlin, a Botzen liqueur manufacturer with two sons, Baron Meudolt who had just come back from his travels round the world, a retired actor from Bückeberg, a widowed Countess Saima, who had been an actress in her youth, her daughter, and the Danish painter, Petersen.

Only a few of the guests lived in the castle. Some of them took lodgings in Botzen, others stayed in a modest hotel at the cross-roads below, where a small lane branched off up to the castle. But the whole company usually met at the castle in the early afternoon, and then, sometimes under the direction of the retired actor, sometimes under that of the Baron, who never acted himself, rehearsals were held that lasted till the evening. They began with jokes and laughter but gradually grew more and more serious until the day of the performance arrived, when, as the weather, caprice, or arrangements might dictate, but as far as possible taking account of the scene of the action, the representation took place either in the meadow beyond the little garden of the castle at the edge of the forest

or in the ground-floor hall with its three great bow windows.

When I first called on the Baron I had no other idea than to spend a cheerful day in a fresh place among fresh people. But as happens when a man wanders about aimlessly and in complete freedom, and when, too, he is no longer in his first youth and has no vital ties to call him home, I allowed myself to be persuaded by the Baron to stay for some time. One day became two, and three, and more, and so, to my own astonishment, I took up my abode until far into the autumn up at the little castle where a very comfortably furnished room in a small tower, with a view into the valley, was given up to my use. This first visit of mine to Guntschnaberg was entirely delightful, and remains with me as a very peaceful memory, for I made no more than a fleeting acquaintance of any of the guests, and also, as I felt equally inclined for reflection and for work, I spent a large part of my time in solitary walks in the woods. Not even the circumstance that the Baron, in his courtesy, had one of my little plays performed disturbed my peace, as no one took any notice of me in my character as author. I look upon that evening much rather as a most delightful experience, for with that performance in the green

meadow, and under the open sky, a modest dream of my youth came to a late and, indeed by that time, an unexpected fulfillment.

The stir and movement in the castle gradually began to die down, the men's leave—such of them as belonged to a profession—was running out, and we only had a few visits from friends settled in the neighbourhood. It was only then that I began to get better acquainted with the Baron and found in him, to my surprise, a great deal more modesty than is commonly the case with amateurs. He did not in the least try to persuade himself that what went on at his castle was anything else than a higher form of social amusement. But as the course of his life had prevented his entering upon a lasting and serious connection with his beloved art, he allowed himself to be satisfied with the glamour shed, as it were, from a far distance over the harmless theatricalities in the castle, and was moreover glad that they were untainted by the sordid details that professionalism always brings with it.

In the course of one of our walks he mentioned quite incidentally that he hoped one day to see on his open-air stage a play that had been constructed with an eye to the unconfined space and the natural background. This observation fell so nearly in with

a plan that I had been meditating for some time that I promised the Baron to carry out his wish.

Soon afterwards I left the castle. In the early days of the next spring I sent to the Baron, with a friendly message recalling my delightful stay the previous autumn, a play that I thought might suit his purpose. I soon got an answer from him, conveying his thanks, and a hearty invitation for the coming autumn. I spent the summer in the mountains, and in the early days of September when the cooler weather set in I went down to the Lake of Garda without realising that I was quite near the Baron von Schottenegg's castle. Yes, it seems to-day as if I had at that time completely forgotten the little castle and all its doings. On September 8th I got a letter from the Baron sent on from Vienna, expressing his mild astonishment at not having heard from me, and informing me that on September 9th the little play I had sent him in the spring was to be performed, and that I must on no account fail to be present. The Baron promised me special pleasure from the children who were playing in the piece; they could not be induced to leave it, and even in between the rehearsals ran about in their costumes and played in the meadow. The chief part, he continued, had, as a result of a series of accidents, fallen to his nephew,

Herr Franz von Umprecht, who—as I no doubt remembered—had only twice taken a part in tableaux, but had developed a surprising talent as an actor.

I started off, reached Botzen by evening of the performance. I went up to the castle, where the Baron and his wife received me very graciously. There were also other old acquaintances: the retired actor, the Countess Saima with her daughter, Herr von Umprecht and his lovely wife, and the fourteen-year-old daughter of the forester who was to speak the prologue to my piece. A large company was expected for the afternoon, and at the performance in the evening there would be more than a hundred spectators, not merely personal guests of the Baron, but people from the surrounding neighbourhood, who, as often before, were freely admitted to the rustic theatre. On this occasion a small orchestra had been engaged consisting of professional musicians from Botzen and a few amateurs, who were to play an overture of Weber, and also some incidental music which the Baron had himself composed.

We were all very gay at lunch, only Herr von Umprecht seemed to me more silent than the rest. At first I could hardly call him to mind, and I was astonished to notice that he glanced at me with an air of under-

standing, and then with a timid sort of expression, without however addressing a word to me. His face gradually grew more familiar, and I suddenly remembered that in one of last year's tableaux he had impersonated a monk sitting with upturned elbows at a chess-board. I asked him whether I were not mistaken. He seemed almost confused when I addressed him: the Baron answered for him, and made some jesting remark about his nephew's newly discovered histrionic talent. At which Herr von Umprecht laughed rather strangely and stared in front of him; then he threw a quick glance at me suggestive of some kind of understanding between us, which I was quite unable to explain. But from that moment he avoided meeting my eye.

II

Soon after lunch I had gone up to my room. I stood once more at the open window as I had so often done in the previous year, and enjoyed the delightful view down into the valley which, quite narrow just below me, gradually widened and then completely opened out to take in the town and the surrounding meadows.

After a short time there was a knock at the door. Herr von Umprecht came in, stopped in the doorway and said with a certain timidity: "Excuse me if I am disturbing you." Then he came nearer and went on: "But as soon as you have listened to me for a quarter of an hour, I am convinced that you will think there was good reason for my visit."

I invited Herr von Umprecht to sit down. He took no notice but continued excitedly: "I am, in fact, in the strangest way your debtor and I feel it my duty to thank you."

Of course I thought—how should I not?—that these words of Herr von Umprecht referred to his part, and as they seemed more than courtesy demanded, I made some deprecatory reply. But Umprecht immediately interrupted me. "You cannot know the intention of my words. Might I ask you to listen to me?" He sat down on the window-seat, crossed his legs, and making an obvious effort to control himself as far as possible, he began: "I am now the owner of an estate, as you perhaps know, but before that I was an officer. And at that time, ten years ago—ten years ago *to-day*—I met with the incredible adventure under the shadow of which I have in a sense lived until now, and which to-day finds its fulfillment through you, though with-

out your knowledge and aid. Between us two there is indeed some bond that is not of this world, which you will probably be as little able to explain as I am. But you must at least learn of its existence.

"At that time my regiment was stationed in some wretched little hole in Poland. The only distractions beyond our duties, which were not always enough to occupy us, were drink and play. Beyond that, we had before our eyes the possibility of having to stick there for years, and not all of us knew how to face such a comfortless prospect. One of my best friends had shot himself in the third month of our stay there. Another brother officer, once the best fellow among us, suddenly developed into a complete drunkard, became unmannerly, bad-tempered, almost undependable, and had some sort of scene with a lawyer that cost him his commission. The captain of my company was married and—I don't know whether justifiably or not—so jealous that he one day threw his wife out of the window. Mysteriously enough she was not hurt; her husband died in a mad-house. One of our subalterns, who had until then been an excellent lad, though extraordinarily stupid, suddenly took it into his head that he could understand philosophy, studied Kant and Hegel, and learnt whole sections of their works off by

heart, as children learn their spelling books. As for me, I did nothing but bore myself, and that so terribly, that often as I lay on my bed of an afternoon I was afraid I might go mad. Our barracks lay outside the town, and consisted of at most thirty scattered huts: the next town, a good hour's ride away, was dirty, disgusting, smelly, and full of Jews. We were forced to have a certain amount to do with them—the hotel-keeper was a Jew, so was the owner of the café, and the shoemaker. You can well imagine that we treated them with as much contempt as possible. They irritated us particularly, because a certain prince who was attached to our regiment as major always returned the Jews' salutes with studied courtesy—whether he did it to amuse himself or whether he really liked them, I do not know—and he also, strange as it seems, took most particular pains to protect our regimental doctor, who was quite obviously of Jewish extraction. I would, of course, not tell you this except that it was precisely this caprice on the part of the prince that brought me into contact with that personage who was called on to create in so mysterious a fashion the bond between yourself and me. He was a conjurer, and in fact the son of a Jewish brandy merchant in the neighbouring small Polish town. As

a young man he had been in business at Lemberg, and then gone to Vienna where he had learnt a few card-tricks from somebody. He went on practising by himself, picked up some more conjuring tricks one way and another, and gradually made such progress that he was able to go about the world and appear with success in music-halls or at receptions. In the summer he always came back to his native town to visit his parents. There he never appeared in public, and thus it was that I first saw him in the street, where I was at once astonished by his appearance. He was a small, thin, beardless man, probably at that time about thirty years of age, dressed with a ridiculous elegance quite unsuitable to the season of the year: he walked about in a black frock-coat and a glossy tall hat, and wore magnificently brocaded waistcoats: and in strong sunshine he wore a pair of dark spectacles on his nose.

"One evening some fifteen or sixteen of us were sitting as usual after dinner at our long table in the mess. It was a sultry night and the windows stood open. A few of us had begun to play cards, others leaned against the window and talked, others drank and smoked in silence. Then the corporal of the day came in and announced the conjurer's arrival. We were

at first rather astonished, but without more ado our visitor calmly appeared and introduced himself in a few words in his fluent jargon, thanking us for the invitation that had been sent him. As he said this, he turned to the prince, who went up to him and—simply to annoy us, of course—shook hands with him. The conjurer took this as perfectly natural, and then observed that he would show us a few card-tricks, after which he said he would do some experiments in hypnotism and palmistry. He had scarcely finished when some of our officers who were sitting in a corner playing cards noticed that the court cards were not there; at a sign from the conjurer they came flying in through the open window. The tricks that followed were very interesting, and went a good deal beyond anything of the kind I had ever seen. The hypnotic experiments he then carried out seemed to me even more remarkable. We all felt something like horror when we saw our philosophic subaltern put to sleep, and then, in obedience to the magician's orders, jump through the open window, scramble up the smooth wall to the roof, run round the whole quadrangle close to the edge and then slide down into the barrack square. When he stood on the ground again, still in a state of trance, the colonel said to the magician: 'If he had

broken his neck, you wouldn't have left the barracks alive, I promise you.' Never shall I forget the contemptuous look which was the Jew's silent reply to this remark. Then he said slowly:

" 'Shall I read your hand, sir, and tell you whether you will leave this barracks dead or alive?'

"I don't know how the colonel and the rest of us would have usually answered such an impertinent remark, but there was such a weird, excited feeling in the air that no one was surprised when the colonel reached out his hand to the conjurer and said, imitating the man's dialect: 'Read away.'

"All this took place in the barrack-yard, and the subaltern, still in the trance, stood against the wall with outstretched arms like one crucified. The conjurer took the colonel's hand and carefully studied the lines.

" 'Can you see all right, Jew?' asked a lieutenant, who was rather drunk.

"The other glanced at him, and said gravely: 'My professional name is Marco Polo.'

"The prince laid a hand on the Jew's shoulder and said: 'My friend Marco Polo has sharp eyes.'

" 'Well, what do you see?' asked the colonel more politely.

" 'Must I say?' asked Marco Polo.

"'We can't force you,' said the prince.

"'Speak!' cried the colonel.

"'I would rather not,' answered Marco Polo.

"The colonel laughed loudly. 'Out with it,' he said, 'it can't be as bad as all that. And if it is, it can't be true.'

"'It is very bad,' said the conjurer, 'and it is also true.'

"All were silent.

"'Well?' said the colonel.

"'You will not have to suffer from the cold any more,' answered Marco Polo.

"'What!' cried the colonel. 'Is the regiment going to be sent to Riva at last?'

"'I can see nothing about the regiment, sir. All I can see is that you will be dead by the autumn.'

"The colonel laughed, but all the rest were silent and I assure you we all felt that a mark was set upon the colonel in that moment. Then someone intentionally broke into a loud laugh, the rest did likewise, and with a clatter of noise and laughter we all went back into the mess.

"'Well,' said the colonel, 'my business is settled. Isn't anyone else curious?'

"One answered jestingly: 'No, we don't want to find

out anything.' Another suddenly discovered that having one's fate foretold like this was strictly contrary to religious principle, and a young lieutenant observed with emphasis that people like Marco Polo ought to be locked up for life. I saw the prince standing smoking in a corner with one of the senior officers and heard him say: 'Where does the magic begin?' In the meantime I walked up to Marco Polo who was getting ready to go, and said, without letting anyone else hear:

" 'Prophesy for me.'

"He took my hand almost mechanically. Then he said:

" 'I can't see properly here.'

"I noticed that the oil lamps had begun to flicker, and that the lines on my hand seemed to quiver.

" 'Come outside into the yard, lieutenant; I can do it better in the moonlight.' He still held my hand, and I followed him outside through the open door.

"Suddenly a strange thought came into my mind.

" 'Listen, Marco Polo, if what you did for the colonel is all that you can do, I would sooner leave it alone.'

"Without more ado the magician dropped my hand and smiled.

" 'The lieutenant is afraid.'

"I turned quickly to see if anyone had heard us; but we were already through the barracks gate, and on the main road leading to the town.

" 'I want to know something a little more definite,' I said; 'that is what I mean. Words can always be interpreted in different ways.'

"Marco Polo looked at me.

" 'What does the lieutenant want? . . . perhaps the portrait of his future wife?'

" 'Could you manage that?'

"Marco Polo shrugged his shoulders.

" 'It could be done. . . . It is possible.'

" 'Well, I don't want to see that,' I answered. 'I want to know what will be happening to me some time later on—say in ten years.'

"Marco Polo shook his head.

" 'I can't do that—but I can do something else perhaps.'

" 'What?'

" 'I can show you a picture of any given moment of your future life, Herr Lieutenant.'

"I did not at once understand.

" 'What do you mean?'

" 'I mean this: I can conjure into existence a mo-

ment of your future life, so that we who are standing here can see it.'

" 'What!'

" 'The Herr Lieutenant must just say which moment he wants.'

"I did not quite understand, but I was in a state of great tension.

" 'Good!' said I; 'if you can do that, I should like to see what will be happening to me this very second in ten years' time. . . . Do you understand, Marco Polo?'

" 'Certainly, Herr Lieutenant,' said Marco Polo, and looked at me steadily.

"And very soon he was gone . . . but gone, too, were the barracks, which I had just seen glittering in the moonlight—gone were the mean huts scattered over the moonlit plain, and I saw my own self, as a man often sees himself in dreams—I saw myself ten years older, with a brown beard, a scar on my forehead, stretched out on a bier, in the middle of a meadow—and kneeling at my side a beautiful woman with red hair, holding her hands before her face; near me were a boy and a girl, a dark forest in the background, and not far off stood two huntsmen with torches in their hands. . . . You're astonished, eh? aren't you?"

I was indeed astonished, for what he was describing to me was the scene with which my play was to end this evening at ten o'clock, and in which he was to play the dying hero.

"You don't believe me," continued Herr von Umprecht; "and I don't blame you. But I will soon make you believe me."

Herr von Umprecht felt in his coat pocket and produced a sealed envelope.

"Please look at what is written on the back."

I read aloud:

"Sealed and attested on January 4th, 1859, to be opened on September 9th, 1868." And beneath it was the signature of a Vienna notary personally well known to me, one Dr. Artiner.

"That is to-day," said Herr von Umprecht. "And it is exactly ten years ago to-day that I had my mysterious adventure with Marco Polo which is now to reach its climax, though it is no less mysterious than ever. Year after year, as though I had been the sport of a capricious fate, I was beset in the strangest way by possibilities that might or might not bring fulfillment of that prophecy: sometimes they threatened to become realities, then vanished, again looked pitilessly certain, then passed into the distance, and again

returned. . . . But I must come back to my story. The vision itself certainly did not last longer than a moment, for the same loud burst of laughter from the lieutenant still echoed in my ears which I had heard before the phantasm appeared. And Marco Polo stood once more before me with a smile on his lips, whether sad or contemptuous I could not say, took off his top hat and said 'Good evening, Herr Lieutenant, I hope you were pleased,' turned, and went slowly along the high road in the direction of the town. And in the course of the next few days he went away.

"My first thought was, when I got back to the barracks, that it must have been some supernatural appearance which Marco Polo, perhaps by the help of an unseen assistant, was able to produce by some sort of arrangement of mirrors. As I walked through the barrack-yard I saw to my horror the subaltern still leaning against the wall in an attitude of crucifixion. He had clearly been completely forgotten. I heard the others inside talking and disputing in a great state of excitement. I took the lad by the arm. He immediately woke up, showed no signs of surprise, except that he could not understand his brother officers' excited state of mind. I myself joined, with a kind of dull rage, in the heated but futile conversation that

had been started about the strange happenings that we had witnessed, and I talked no more sense than any of the others. Suddenly the colonel cried out:

" 'Well, gentlemen, I'll bet I'm alive next spring. Forty-five to one!'

"And he turned to one of our officers, a lieutenant, who enjoyed a certain reputation for betting and gambling. 'Anything doing?' Although it was clear that the other found his proposal hard to resist, he apparently thought it unseemly to make a bet on the death of his colonel with the colonel himself. So he smiled and said nothing. He must have regretted it; for a fortnight later, on the second day of the great imperial manœuvres, our colonel fell from his horse and was killed on the spot. And when this happened we all realised that we had expected nothing else.

"It was not until then, however, that I began to think with a certain disquiet of that nocturnal prophecy, of which with some strange diffidence I had said nothing to anyone. It was at Christmas, while on leave in Vienna, that I opened the matter to a friend —a certain Frederick von Gulant—you have perhaps heard of him, he wrote charming verses, and died very young. . . . Well, he it was who, with my con-

sent, drew up the document that you will find in this envelope. His view, in fact, was that such events should not be lost to knowledge, whether their hypotheses were finally proved to be true or false. I went with him to Dr. Artiner, in whose presence this envelope was sealed. It has been kept in the lawyer's office until now, and not until yesterday was it handed over to me at my request. I am prepared to confess that the gravity with which Gulant treated the affair somewhat upset me at first, but when we had parted, and especially when he died shortly afterwards, the whole story began to look highly ridiculous.

"In the first place, it was clear to me that I had my fate entirely in my own hands. Nothing in the world could compel me to lie on a bier, wearing a brown beard, at ten o'clock on the evening of September 9th, 1868; I could keep away from forest and meadows, and I did not need to marry a wife with red hair and have children. The only thing that I perhaps could not avoid was an accident, say a duel, which might leave me a scar on my forehead. So, to begin with, I was quite undisturbed.

"A year after this prophecy I married Fräulein von Heimsal, my present wife; soon afterwards I left the service and took up farming. I visited various

moderate-sized estates, and—ridiculous as it may sound —I took care that they did not include any ground that could resemble the meadow of my dream—for so I was accustomed to think of that phantasmal scene. I was on the point of concluding a purchase when my wife inherited some property, and with it an estate in Carinthia with some excellent shooting. The first day I walked over my new domain I came upon a stretch of meadowland which, edged as it was by forest and gently sloping, seemed to me singularly like the place I had, perhaps, every reason to avoid. I was slightly alarmed. I had said nothing to my wife about the prophecy: she is so superstitious that my confession would certainly have poisoned her whole life until"—here he smiled with something like relief—"until to-day. So, of course, I could not share my anxiety with her. But I comforted myself with the conviction that there was nothing to make me spend September of 1868 on my estate.

"In the year 1860 a son was born to me. From his earliest childhood I believed I could detect in his features some resemblance to those of the boy in my dream: sometimes it seemed to pass, and sometimes to grow more noticeable—to-day I have to confess to myself that the boy who is to stand by my bier at

ten o'clock this evening is the very image of the boy of the vision. I have no daughter. But it so happened three years ago that my wife's widowed sister, who had been living in America, died leaving a small daughter. At my wife's request I crossed to America, and fetched the child to be brought up at home. When I first caught sight of her, I thought I noticed that she was completely like the girl in the dream. It did occur to me to leave the child among strangers in a strange land, but, of course, I immediately put away so dishonourable a thought and we took the child into our house. I again quite recovered my peace of mind, in spite of the children's growing resemblance to the children of the apparition, for I told myself that my recollection of such childish faces of a dream might very well be deceptive. For a time my life flowed onward in complete peace. Yes, I had almost given up thinking of that strange evening in that dirty little hole in Poland when, two years ago, I was, not unreasonably, greatly shaken by a fresh warning of fate. I had had to be some months away from home; when I came back my wife met me with red hair, and her resemblance to the lady of the dream, whose face I had indeed never seen, seemed to me complete. I thought it best to hide my fear under an appearance

of anger. I intentionally grew more and more furious, for an idea bordering on madness suddenly came into my mind: if I separated from my wife and children, all the danger must disappear, and I should have made a fool of destiny. My wife wept, sank to the ground in a collapse, begged my pardon, and explained the alteration in her appearance. A year before, upon the occasion of a journey to Munich, I became infatuated with the portrait of a red-haired woman in the exhibition there, and my wife had then and there made up her mind that she would take the first opportunity of making herself like the portrait, and would dye her hair. I naturally made her promise to get her hair back to its natural colour as soon as possible, and when that was done all seemed right again. Was it not clear that I had, as before, my fate in my own power? . . . Could not everything that had happened until now be explained quite naturally? . . . Had not thousands of other men estates with fields and forests, and a wife and children? . . . And the only thing that might perhaps have alarmed a superstitious man had not happened, and did not, until this last winter: the scar, that you now see adorning my forehead. I am not a coward—if you will let me say so; I fought two duels when I was an of-

ficer, under very dangerous conditions—and again eight years ago, shortly before my marriage, when I had already left the service. But when last year I was challenged on some trivial ground—an alleged want of courtesy in greeting someone—I preferred"—Herr von Umprecht blushed slightly—"to apologise. The affair was, of course, disposed of in due order, but I am perfectly certain that I should have fought on that occasion if I had not been seized by some lunatic fear that my opponent would wound me in the forehead, and slip another trump into the hand of fate. . . . But as you see, it did not help me: the scar is there. And the moment in which I got that wound was perhaps, in all the last years, the one that brought me the deepest realisation of my defencelessness. It was one evening last winter: I was in a train between Klagenfurt and Villach. Suddenly there was a jingle of glass, and I felt a pain in my forehead: at the same time something hard fell to the ground. I put my hand up to the place—it was bleeding: then I bent quickly down and picked up a pointed stone from the floor. The people in the carriage jumped up. 'What has happened?' cried one of them. They noticed I was bleeding and were much concerned. But there was one man—I can see him so clearly—who sat buried in

his corner. At the next stop water was fetched, the station doctor put on a makeshift bandage; but while I was, of course, not afraid of dying of the wound, I knew that it must leave a scar. A conversation started in the carriage as to whether the stone was aimed at someone or whether it was just a boyish prank. The man in his corner said nothing and stared in front of him. At Villach I got out. Suddenly I found the man beside me. 'It was meant for me,' he said. Before I could answer or even collect myself, he had disappeared; and I have never found out who it was. Someone with persecution-mania perhaps, or someone who had good reason to think himself pursued by some injured husband or brother, and whom I had possibly saved, as the scar was to be my fate. . . . Who can tell? . . . After a few weeks it came out on my forehead exactly where I had seen it in my dream. And it became clearer than ever to me that I was caught in an unequal battle with an unknown mocking power, and with growing uneasiness I waited for the last scene of all.

"In the spring we received my uncle's invitation. I was quite determined not to accept it as, although I could not recall any definite picture, it seemed not impossible that the dreadful place might be on his property. But my wife would not have understood a

refusal, so I decided to come here with her and the children at the beginning of July, with the definite intention of leaving the castle as soon as possible and going further south, to Venice or the Lido. Very soon after we arrived the subject of your play came up, my uncle spoke of the small parts for children it contained, and asked me to let my two act in it. I had no objection. It was then his intention that the hero's part should be taken by a professional actor. A few days later I was seized with a fear that I might fall dangerously ill and not be able to leave. So one evening I announced that I thought of leaving the castle on the next day for a short time and getting some sea bathing. I had to promise to come back at the beginning of September. The same evening there came a letter from the actor throwing up his part on some trivial ground. My uncle was very annoyed. He asked me to read the play—perhaps I could suggest someone we both knew who would suit the part? So I took the play up to my room and read it.

"Now try to imagine what passed in my mind when I came to the end and found described, word for word, the scene that had been predicted to me for September 9th of this year. I could not wait until the next day to tell my uncle that I wanted to play the part.

I was afraid that he would make objections, for since I had read the piece I felt as though I had come once more into safe keeping, and if I lost the chance of playing in your piece I would again become a victim to that unknown power. My uncle agreed at once and from then everything went on its smooth accustomed way. We have been rehearsing every day for several weeks, and I have gone through the scene that I must act this evening fifteen or twenty times already; I lie on the bier, the young Countess Saima with her lovely red hair, and her hands before her face, kneels before me, and the children stand at my side."

While Herr von Umprecht uttered these words my eyes fell upon the envelope that lay upon the table still unopened. Herr von Umprecht smiled. "True, I still owe you a proof," he said, and broke the seal. Inside was a folded paper. Umprecht unfolded it and spread it out on the table. Before me lay a complete plan of the final scene of the play, as I had conceived it myself. The background and wings were sketched out and marked "forest": in the centre of the plan a horizontal object, with a male figure upon it, was indicated and marked "bier." . . . Against the clear sketched-out figure was written in small letters with red ink: "Woman with red hair," "boy," "girl," "torch

bearer," "man with raised hands." I turned to Herr von Umprecht. "What does that mean? 'Man with raised hands'?"

"I had almost forgotten about that," said Herr von Umprecht slowly. "That figure comes into it in this way: in my vision was an old man lit up by the glare of the torches, completely bald, clean shaven, wearing spectacles and a dark green shawl round his neck, with raised hands and wide-staring eyes."

This time I was startled. We were silent for a while, then, feeling strangely uneasy, I said: "Who do you think it is? Who could it be?"

"I assume," said Umprecht calmly, "that it is one of the spectators, perhaps one of my uncle's servants . . . or one of the peasants might have been overcome by the end of the play and tried to get on the stage . . . or perhaps fate has decreed that some lunatic, escaped from the asylum, by one of those coincidences which have nearly ceased to surprise me, is to rush across the stage just at the moment I am lying on my bier."

I shook my head.

"What did you say? . . . bald . . . spectacles . . . a green shawl? Now the thing seems stranger than ever. There was to have been a character in my

play just like the figure you saw, but I suppressed it. It was the wife's mad father, who is mentioned in the first act and was to rush on to the stage at the end."

"But his shawl and spectacles?"

"That must have been the actor's own contribution, don't you think?"

"Possibly."

We were interrupted. Frau von Umprecht had sent to say that she would like to speak to her husband before the performance, and he took his leave. I stayed for awhile poring over the stage plan that Herr von Umprecht had left lying on the table.

III

Not long afterwards I made my way to the place where the play was to be performed. It lay behind the small castle and was separated from it by a pleasantly laid-out garden; and by the low edge at the end of it stood about ten long benches of plain wood; the front rows were covered with dark red tapestry. Beyond the first row stood a few music-stands and chairs: there was no curtain. The separation of the stage from the auditorium was indicated by two towering great pine trees, one at each side; on the right there was

a rough shrubbery and behind it a comfortable easy-chair, invisible to the audience, for the prompter. On the left the place was open and there was a view down into the valley. Tall trees formed the background of the stage, only in the centre were they close together, and on the left some narrow paths crept out of the shadow. Farther back among the trees, in a little artificial clearing, was a table and some chairs where the actors were to wait for their cues. The lighting was provided by some tall old church lanterns with gigantic tapers, erected at the side of the stage and the auditorium in what would have been the wings. Behind the shrubbery to the right was a sort of open-air property room; there I saw among various small objects needed in the play the bier on which Herr von Umprecht was to die at the conclusion of the piece. . . . As I walked across the meadow it was glowing in the mild evening sunshine.

I had naturally thought over Herr von Umprecht's story. At first I thought it was not impossible that Herr von Umprecht was one of those fantastic liars who go to all sorts of trouble to prepare a mystification from a long while ahead so as to make themselves interesting. I thought it conceivable that the notary's signature was a forgery, and that Herr von

Umprecht had enlisted accomplices to carry the matter through with conviction. I found my mind dwelling on the hitherto unknown man with raised hands, with whom Umprecht might well have entered into some understanding. But the part that this man had played in my first sketch of the piece, which no one could have known—and especially the favourable personal impression that Herr von Umprecht had made on me—dismissed my doubts. And improbable and even monstrous as his whole story seemed, I actually longed to be able to believe it; perhaps it was no mad vanity to feel myself the instrument of an overmastering will.

In the meantime I became aware of some stir and movement near by: servants were coming out of the castle, tapers were being lit, people from the neighbourhood—most of them in peasant dress—were slowly climbing up the hill and disposing themselves modestly at the ends of the benches. Soon our hostess appeared with several ladies and gentlemen, who sat down here and there. I joined them and talked to some of them I had met last year. The members of the orchestra had appeared and were taking their places: they were a strange assortment: two violins, a cello, a viola, a double bass, a flute, and an oboe.

They at once began, obviously before the proper time, to play a Weber overture. Right in front near the orchestra stood an old peasant, with a bald head and a sort of dark scarf round his neck. Perhaps, I thought, he was the figure ordained by fate to put on a pair of spectacles later on, go mad, and rush on to the stage. The daylight was now completely gone; the tall lanterns flickered a little, as a light wind had got up. There was much activity behind the shrubbery, and the cast were making their way along the hidden paths towards the stage. Then, for the first time, I thought of the others who were taking part in it, and it occurred to me that I had seen none of them except Herr von Umprecht, his children, and the forester's daughter. Then I heard the loud voice of the stage director and the laugh of the young Countess Saima. The benches were full, the Baron sat in one of the front rows and was talking to the Countess Saima. The orchestra struck up, the forester's daughter came forward and spoke the prologue. The theme of the piece was the fate of a man who, seized by a sudden longing for adventures and far-off lands, leaves his home without saying good-bye, and in the course of a day meets with so much grief and disaster that he proposes to go home before his wife and children have

missed him; but a last adventure on his way back ends in his murder, and before he dies he has only time to greet his abandoned dear ones, to whom his flight and death are riddles without an answer.

The play had begun: both men and women spoke their parts attractively: the simple presentation of the simple episodes gave me pleasure, and, to begin with, I thought no more of Herr von Umprecht's story. At the end of the first act the orchestra again began to play, but there was such a noise of talking on the benches that no one listened. I myself was not sitting, I was standing, hidden from the company, rather near to the stage on the left side, where the road could be seen dipping down into the valley. The second act began; the wind had become rather stronger, and the flickering lights contributed not a little to the effect of the piece. The performers again disappeared among the trees and the orchestra began once more. At that moment I happened to glance at the flute-player who wore spectacles and was clean-shaven; but he had long white hair and there was no sign of a shawl. The music stopped and the performers again appeared on the stage. Then I noticed that the flute-player, who had laid his instrument on the stand in front of him, put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a large

woollen shawl and wound it round his neck. I was extremely taken aback. The next moment Herr von Umprecht appeared. I saw his eyes suddenly fix upon the flute-player, I saw him mark the green shawl and falter for an instant: but he had soon pulled himself together and went on with his part unperturbed. I asked a roughly dressed young countryman near me if he knew the flute-player, and was told that he was a schoolmaster from Kaltern. The play progressed, and began to near its end. The two children wandered, as the play directs, across the stage; there was a noise of tumult in the forest that came gradually nearer, and shouts and cries were heard: not inappropriately, the wind grew stronger, and the branches began to sway: and at last Herr von Umprecht, the dying knight-errant, was carried on to the stage. The two children rushed up, and the torch-bearers stood motionless at the side. The wife came in later than the rest, and with a face distorted by anguish, sank down by the side of the murdered man: he wants to open his lips once more, tries to raise himself up, but —as it was written in the play—he fails. At that moment came a tremendous gust of wind that threatened to extinguish the torches: I see someone jumping to his feet in the orchestra—it is flute-player—to my

amazement he is bald, his wig has been blown off, and with his green shawl streaming from his neck, he rushes at the stage. Unconsciously I glanced at Umprecht: his wide eyes were fixed on the man with something like ecstasy: he tried to speak . . . it was clear he could not, and he sank down once more. Many of the audience still thought that all this was part of the play: I myself was not certain what to make of Umprecht's second collapse: meanwhile the man had passed the bier, still in pursuit of his wig, and disappeared into the forest. Umprecht did not move; a fresh gust of wind put out one of the two torches: a few people right in front became uneasy—I heard the Baron saying "Hush!" All was silent again—even the wind had dropped . . . but Umprecht still lay full length; he did not stir nor move his lips. The Countess Saima shrieked—and the audience thought that this was part of the play. But I, elbowing my way through the people, rushed on to the stage, while I could hear a growing disturbance behind me. Everyone got up, and some followed me; the bier was surrounded. . . . "What is the matter? what has happened?" . . . I snatched a torch from the hand of one of the torch-bearers and lit up the face of the prostrate man. . . . I shook him and tore open his shirt. Meantime, the

doctor had appeared beside me; he sounded Herr Umprecht's heart, felt his pulse, told everyone to stand aside, whispered a few words to the Baron. . . . The wife of the man on the bier forced her way through the throng, shrieked, flung herself over her husband; the children stood by as though turned to stone, and could not understand. . . . No one would believe what had happened, and yet they were all telling each other—and a minute later it was known among all the company that Herr von Umprecht had died suddenly on the bier on which he had been carried on to the stage. . . .

I hurried down into the valley the same evening, completely overcome with horror. I was in such a shaken condition that I could not bring myself to go inside the castle again. I spoke to the Baron the following day in Botzen; there I told him Umprecht's story, as Umprecht himself had told it to me. The Baron would not believe it; I felt in my pocket-book and showed him the mysterious paper: he looked at me with astonishment, even with concern, and gave me back the sheet—it was white, not a sign of any writing or drawing. . . .

I made attempts to find Marco Polo; but all I could discover about him was that he had appeared for the

last time three years ago in a low-class Hamburg music-hall.

But among so many mysteries, the greatest mystery of all is the fact that the schoolmaster, who ran after his wig with outstretched hands and disappeared into the forest, was never seen again; not so much as his corpse was ever found.

Editor's Note:—

I was not personally acquainted with the editor of the foregoing narrative. He was in his time a rather well-known author, but had almost entirely dropped out when he died ten years ago at the age of scarcely sixty. As he left no special directions, all his papers came into the hands of his old friend in Meran, mentioned in the narrative. From this friend, a doctor, with whom during a stay in Meran last winter I used at times to discuss such dark matters as ghosts, telepathy, and second-sight, I received the manuscript that is here reproduced. I should gladly regard the whole story as a work of the imagination, had not the doctor, as appears in the narrative, been present at the performance described at the end, with its strange dénouement, and also been personally acquainted with the schoolmaster who disappeared so mysteri-

ously. As regards the magician, Marco Polo, I remember very well when I was quite a young man seeing his name on a theatre notice while I was on a holiday at the Wörthersee: it remained in my memory because just at that time I was about to read that famous traveller's description of his journeys.

BLIND GERONIMO AND HIS BROTHER

BLIND GERONIMO AND HIS BROTHER

BLIND GERONIMO GOT UP FROM THE BENCH AND reached for his guitar which was lying ready on the table near his wine-glass. He had heard the distant rumbling of the first carriage. He felt his familiar way to the open door, and then went down the narrow wooden stairway that led into the covered courtyard. His brother followed him, and they then placed themselves close to the stairs, with their backs to the wall, so as to be sheltered against the damp cold wind that swept over the muddy ground through the open gates.

All the carriages that went by the Stelvio Pass had to drive under the gloomy archway of the old inn. It was the last stopping-place, before the top, for travellers going from Italy to Tyrol. It did not invite a long stay for the road here was fairly level, without views, and ran between barren heights. The blind Italian, and his brother Carlo, almost made the place their home during the summer months.

The mail-coach drove in and other carriages soon

followed it. Most of the travellers stayed in their seats, well wrapped up in shawls and cloaks, others got out and marched impatiently up and down between the gates. The weather grew continually worse, and a chilly rain began to patter down. After a succession of lovely days, it seemed as though autumn had broken suddenly and all too soon.

The blind man sang, and accompanied himself on his guitar: he sang in an uneven voice, which sometimes rose into something like a shriek, as indeed it always did when he had been drinking. Sometimes he turned his face upwards with an expression of fruitless entreaty. But the lineaments of his face, with its short, stubby beard and its bluish lips, remained completely immobile. The other brother stood beside him, always motionless. When someone dropped a coin in the hat he nodded his thanks, and looked into the giver's face with a quick, almost puzzled look. But then, as though in fear, he looked away again, and stared like his brother into the void. It seemed as though his eyes were ashamed of the light that was granted to them, not one ray of which could he give to his blind brother.

"Get me some wine," said Geronimo, and Carlo went, obedient as ever. While he was walking up the

stairs, Geronimo began to sing again. He had long ceased to listen to his own voice, so he was able to notice what went on around him. At that moment he caught two whispering voices, those of a young man and a young woman. He wondered how often these two had travelled back and forward over this road; for in his blindness and his half-fuddled state, it often seemed to him as though the same people came over the Pass day after day, first from north to south and then from south to north. So he had known this young couple for a long time.

Carlo came down and handed Geronimo a glass of wine. The blind man raised his glass to the young couple and said: "Here's your good health!"

"Thanks," said the young man; but the girl drew him away, for the blind man made her feel uncomfortable.

Then a carriage drove in with a rather noisy company: father, mother, three children, and a nurse.

"Germans," said Geronimo softly to Carlo.

The father gave each child a coin, which they were to throw into the beggar's hat. The eldest boy peered into the blind man's face with fearful curiosity. Carlo watched the boy. Whenever he saw a child like this he could not help remembering that Geronimo had

been just that age at the time of the accident which had cost him his sight. Even now, after nearly twenty years, he could recollect that day with perfect clarity. His ears still rang with that shrill childish shriek with which little Geronimo had fallen on the grass, he could still see the flickering circles of sunlight on the white garden wall, and hear once more the Sunday bells which rang out at that moment.

As he had often done before, he had been shooting with his air-gun at the ash tree by the wall, and when he heard the shriek he at once thought he must have wounded his little brother who had just run past. He dropped his gun, jumped through the window into the garden, and dashed towards his little brother, who lay on the grass, wailing, with his hands clasped to his face. Blood was flowing down his right cheek and his neck. At the same moment their father came home from the fields through the little garden gate, and they both knelt helplessly by the wailing child. Neighbours hurried up; the old Vanetti woman was the first to succeed in getting the boy's hand away from his face. Then the blacksmith appeared, to whom Carlo was apprenticed; he had some medical knowledge and he saw at once that the right eye was lost. The doctor, who came from Poschiavo in the evening, could

do no more. He even pointed out the danger to the other eye: and he was right. A year later the world, for Geronimo, was swallowed up in darkness. At first they tried to convince him that he could be cured later on, and he seemed to believe it. Carlo, who knew the truth, wandered day and night up and down the roads, among the vineyards and the forests, and was on the verge of killing himself. But the priest in whom he confided pointed out that it was his duty to live and to devote his life to his brother. Carlo understood. He was seized with a great pity. Only when he was with the blind boy, when he could stroke his hair and kiss his forehead, tell him stories, and take him for walks in the fields behind the house, and among the vine-trellises, did his pain find any relief.

To begin with he had neglected his hours of work at the blacksmith's, because he would not be separated from his brother, and afterwards he could not bring himself to start again, though his father warned him and he worried over it. One day it occurred to Carlo that Geronimo had entirely given up talking of his accident. He soon knew why: the blind boy had realised that he would never again see the sky, the hills, the streets, the people and the light. Carlo was then more miserable than ever, though he tried hard

to comfort himself by the thought that the accident was entirely unintentional on his part. And often and often, when he looked at his brother in the early morning, lying beside him, he was so terrified of seeing him awake that he ran out into the garden so as not to be there when the dead eyes seemed each day to seek once more the light which had gone from them for ever. It was at this time that Carlo had the notion that Geronimo, who had a pleasant voice, should take up music. The schoolmaster of Tola, who often came over on Sunday, taught him to play the guitar. The blind boy had certainly no idea that this newly learnt art was to serve him one day as a means of livelihood.

With that summer's day misfortune seemed to have settled for ever on the house of old Lagardi. The harvest failed one year after another, and the old man was cheated by relatives out of a small sum of money that he had saved: and when, on a sultry day of August, he was seized by an apoplectic fit in the fields and fell down dead, he left nothing but debts. The little property was sold: the two brothers were homeless and destitute and left the village.

Carlo was twenty and Geronimo fifteen. Then began the wandering beggars' existence which they had led until that day. At first Carlo had thought of finding

some kind of work that would support his brother and himself; but he did not succeed. Besides, Geronimo was never at peace; he must always be on the move.

For twenty years now they had wandered about the roads and passes of North Italy and South Tyrol, always where the stream of travellers was thickest.

And if, after so many years, Carlo no longer felt the burning torment with which every ray of sunlight, the view of every pleasant landscape used to fill his heart, there was still a gnawing pity within him, insistent and unsuspected, like the rhythm of his heart and breath. And he was glad when Geronimo got drunk.

The carriage with the German family had driven away. Carlo sat down, as he liked to do, on the lowest step of the stairway, but Geronimo remained standing, dropped his arms limply to his side, and turned his face upwards.

Maria, the maid, came out of the inn-parlour.

"Had a good day?" she called down to them.

Carlo did not turn. The blind man bent over his glass, raised it from the ground and drank to Maria. She often sat beside him of an evening in the inn-parlour and he knew that she was pretty.

Carlo leaned forward and looked out towards the road. The wind blew, and the rain hissed down, and the rumble of an approaching carriage was lost in the noise and tumult. Carlo stood up and took his place again by his brother's side.

Geronimo began to sing, just as the carriage drove in: it contained only one passenger. The driver quickly unharnessed the horses and then hurried towards the inn-parlour. The traveller remained for a while sitting in his corner, quite enveloped in a grey mackintosh: he did not seem to be listening to the singing. After a while he jumped out of the carriage and hurriedly paced up and down, without going very far away from the carriage. He kept on rubbing his hands together to warm himself. Then he seemed to notice the beggars for the first time. He stopped in front of them, and stared at them for a while in a searching sort of way. Carlo inclined his head slightly, as if in salutation. The traveller was a very young man, with a pleasant, clean-shaven face, and restless eyes. After he had stood some time in front of the two beggars, he again hurried to the gate, through which he was to drive forth once more, and shook his head with annoyance at the cheerless prospect of rain and water.

"Well?" said Geronimo.

"Nothing yet," answered Carlo. "He'll probably give us something when he starts out again."

The traveller came back and leaned against the pole of his carriage. The blind man began to sing, and the young man suddenly seemed to be listening with great interest. The ostler appeared and began to put the horses in again. And it was not until then, as though he had just thought of it, the young man felt in his pocket and gave Carlo a franc.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Carlo.

The traveller took his seat in the carriage and wrapped himself in his cloak once more. Carlo picked up his glass and went up the wooden stairway. Geronimo began another song. The traveller leaned out of the carriage and shook his head with an expression of mingled contempt and sadness. Suddenly a fancy seemed to take him, and he smiled. Then he said to the blind man, who was only a pace or two away from him:

"What is your name?"

"Geronimo."

"Well, Geronimo, don't let yourself be cheated."

At that moment the coachman appeared on the top step of the stairway.

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I gave your companion a twenty-franc piece."

"Oh, thank you, sir, thank you."

"Well, but you be careful."

"He's my brother, sir: he wouldn't cheat me."

The young man hesitated for a moment, but while he was still reflecting the coachman had got on to his box and whipped up the horses. The young man leaned back, with a jerk of his head that seemed to say "Fate, take your course," and the carriage drove off.

The blind man waved his hands after him with animated gestures of gratitude. Then he heard Carlo coming out of the inn-parlour. Carlo called down: "Come on, Geronimo, it's warm up here. Maria has made a fire."

Geronimo nodded, took his guitar under his arm, and felt his way up the steps by the banister. While he was on his way he called out: "Let me feel it, it's a long time since I've touched a gold piece."

"What's the matter?" said Carlo. "What are you talking about?"

Geronimo had reached the top and felt with both hands for his brother's head, a gesture that with him always meant joy or affection. "Carlo, my dear

brother, there are still some good people in the world."

"Of course," said Carlo. "Two lire and thirty centimes so far, and a little Austrian money—about half a lira."

"And twenty francs, twenty francs," cried Geronimo. "I know all about it!" He stumbled into the room and sat down heavily on a bench.

"What do you know?" asked Carlo.

"Oh, stop that, do! Give it to me to hold. It is so long since I had a gold piece in my hand."

"What do you mean? How should I get hold of a gold piece? Here are two or three lire."

The blind man brought his fist down on the table. "Stop that fooling, I tell you! Are you trying to hide something from me?"

Carlo looked at his brother with a troubled and astonished expression. He sat down beside him, moved up close and took his arm as if to try and soothe him. "I'm not hiding anything from you. How can you think such a thing? How should anyone give me a gold piece?"

"But he told me so."

"Who did?"

"The young man who was walking up and down."

"What? I don't understand."

"He asked me what my name was, and then he said: 'Don't you let yourself be cheated.'"

"You must have dreamt it, Geronimo—it's nonsense!"

"Nonsense, is it? I heard it, and I can hear quite well: 'Don't you let yourself be cheated. I gave him a gold piece.' No, he said: 'I gave him a twenty-franc piece.'"

The landlord came in. "Well," said he, "and what's the matter with you two? Have you gone out of business? A coach with four horses has just come in."

"Come along," cried Carlo.

Geronimo did not move. "Why should I come? What's the use? You stand there and—"

Carlo took his hand. "Be quiet now and come along!"

Geronimo said no more and obeyed his brother. But on the steps he said: "I haven't done with you."

Carlo did not understand what had happened. Had Geronimo suddenly gone mad? He certainly flew into a rage very easily, but he had never talked like this.

Two Englishmen were sitting in the carriage that

had just arrived; Carlo raised his hat to them, and the blind man sang. One of the Englishmen had got out and flung a few coins into Carlo's hat. Carlo said "Thank you," and then, as if to himself, "Twenty centesimi." Geronimo's face remained unmoved: he began a new song. The carriage with the two Englishmen drove off.

The brothers went silently up the steps. Geronimo sat down on the bench, Carlo remained standing by the stove.

"Why don't you speak?" asked Geronimo.

"Well," said Carlo, "it happened just as I said." His voice trembled a little.

"What was it you said?" asked Geronimo.

"Perhaps he was mad."

"Mad? I dare say! When someone says 'I gave your brother twenty francs,' he's mad, is he? And why did he say 'Don't you let yourself be cheated,' eh?"

"Perhaps he wasn't mad; but there are people who like to play tricks on poor people."

"Tricks!" screamed Geronimo. "Of course you had to say that—I was waiting for that!" He emptied the glass of wine that stood in front of him.

"But, Geronimo!" cried Carlo, and in his confu-

sion he could hardly speak. "Why should I . . . how can you believe . . . ?"

"Why is your voice trembling . . . eh? . . . Tell me that."

"Geronimo, I swear, I . . ."

"Eh? . . . and I don't believe you. And now you're laughing . . . I know you're laughing."

Here the ostler shouted from below: "Hullo, you up there, some people have come."

The brothers stood up quite mechanically and walked down the stairs. Two carriages had arrived at the same time, one with three men, and the other with an old married couple. Geronimo sang; Carlo stood beside him, utterly bewildered. What should he do now? His brother did not believe him? How could that be possible? And he threw a nervous side-long glance at Geronimo who was singing his songs in a cracked voice. It seemed as though strange thoughts were sweeping across his brother's forehead, thoughts that he had never observed there before.

The carriages had already gone, but Geronimo went on singing. Carlo did not dare to interrupt him. He did not know what he could say, and he feared that his voice might tremble again. Then he heard a burst of laughter from above, and Maria called out:

"What are you still singing for? You won't get anything from me!"

Geronimo stopped in the middle of a phrase: it sounded as though his voice and the strings had cracked at the same moment. Then he went up the steps again and Carlo followed him. He sat down beside him in the parlour. What should he do? He could do nothing except try and explain it over again.

"Geronimo," he said, "I swear to you . . . think, Geronimo, how can you believe that I . . ."

Geronimo was silent: his dead eyes seemed to stare out through the window into the grey mist. Carlo went on: "Well, perhaps he wasn't mad, he may have been mistaken . . . yes, he will have been mistaken. . . ." But he knew quite well that he did not believe what he was saying.

Geronimo moved away impatiently. But Carlo went on, with sudden animation: "Why should I—you know I don't eat and drink any more than you do, and when I buy a new coat you know all about it. . . . Why should I need so much money? . . . What should I do with it?"

And Geronimo answered, spitting out the words:

"Don't tell lies. I know you're telling lies!"

"I'm not telling lies, Geronimo," said Carlo, alarmed.

"Eh? You've given it to her already, have you? Or will she get it later on?"

"Maria?"

"Who else? You liar! you thief!"

And as though he no longer wanted to sit beside his brother at the table, he pushed him away with his elbow.

Carlo stood up. At first he stared at his brother, then he left the room and went down the steps into the yard. With staring eyes he looked out at the road, which disappeared into a brownish fog. The rain had stopped. Carlo put his hands in his pockets and went out. He felt as though his brother had driven him away. What had happened? . . . He still could not realise it. What sort of man could that person have been? He had given one franc and said it was twenty. He must have had some reason? . . . And Carlo tried to think if he had somewhere made an enemy who had sent the stranger to take vengeance. . . . But as far back as he could remember, he had never offended any man or had had a serious quarrel with anyone. For twenty years he had done nothing but stand in inn-yards or by the roadside with his hat in his hand.

. . . Perhaps someone had a grudge against him over a woman. . . . But it was long since he had had anything to do with a woman. . . . The waitress at La Rosa had been the last one, in the previous spring . . . but surely no one could have taken offence at that . . . it was not conceivable! . . . There must be people in the world that he did not know. This stranger must have had some motive for telling Geronimo that he had given his brother twenty francs. . . . Surely. . . . But what was he to do now? . . . . It was suddenly clear that Geronimo distrusted him . . . and that he could not bear! He must do something to stop it. . . . And he hurried back.

When he went into the parlour again Geronimo lay outstretched on the bench and did not seem to notice Carlo's entrance. Maria brought them food and drink. They did not utter a word during the meal. When Maria was taking the plates away, Geronimo suddenly burst into a laugh and said:

"What are you going to buy with it?"

"With what?"

"A new petticoat, or some earrings?"

"What's he talking about?" she said, turning to Carlo.

In the meantime there was a loud rumble of heavily-

laden vehicles below in the yard, a din of voices reached them, and Maria hurried down. After a few minutes three drivers came in and sat down at a table: the landlord went up and greeted them. They were cursing the bad weather.

"There will be snow to-night," said one.

The second told how he had been snowed up in the Pass in the middle of August ten years before and almost frozen to death. Maria sat down with them. Then the ostler came in and asked after his parents who lived down in Bormio.

At that moment a carriage with travellers arrived. Geronimo and Carlo went down, Geronimo sang, Carlo held out his hat, and the travellers gave them alms. Geronimo seemed perfectly quiet now. Several times he asked "How much?" and nodded slightly at Carlo's answers. In the meantime Carlo himself tried to collect his thoughts. But his only feeling was a dull conviction that something dreadful had happened, and that he was quite helpless.

When the brothers went up the stairs again, they heard the confused talk and laughter of the drivers up above. The youngest of them shouted out to Geronimo "Sing us something, we'll pay you for it—won't we?" and turned towards the others.

Maria, who had just come in with a bottle of red wine, said: "Let him alone to-day, he's in a bad temper."

Instead of answering, Geronimo stood in the centre of the room and began to sing. When he had finished, the drivers clapped their hands.

"Come here, Carlo," cried one of them, "we want to throw our money into your hat like the people down below." And he took a small coin, and raised his hand as though to drop it in the hat which Carlo held out to him. Then the blind man reached up for the driver's arm and said: "Give it to me, give it to me; it might drop . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it might drop between Maria's legs!"

They all laughed, including the landlord and Maria; only Carlo stood there motionless. Never had Geronimo made such jokes! . . .

"Sit down with us," cried the drivers. "You're a good fellow, you are," and they pushed closer together so as to make room for Geronimo. Their talk became louder and more confused. Geronimo talked too, louder and more gaily than usual, and never stopped drinking. When Maria came down again he tried to pull her to him; one of the drivers laughed

and said: "Perhaps you think she's beautiful—why, she's ugly and old."

But the blind man pulled Maria down on to his knee. "You're all fools," he said. "Do you think I need my eyes to see? I know where Carlo is now—eh?—he's standing over by the stove, with his hands in his trouser pockets, and laughing."

They all looked at Carlo, who was leaning against the stove with his mouth open and did actually screw his face into a grin, as if he did not dare to give his brother the lie.

The ostler came in, and said that if the drivers wanted to get to Bormio before it was dark, they would have to hurry. They got up and went out with a clatter. The two brothers were again alone in the inn-parlour. It was the time when as often as not they were in the habit of sleeping. It was the early afternoon and silence used to fall upon the inn at that hour. Geronimo, with his head on the table, seemed to sleep. Carlo began by pacing up and down, then he sat on the bench. He was very tired. He felt as though he were involved in a wearisome dream. He had to think of all manner of things: of yesterday, and the day before, and all the days that had been, and especially of the warm summer days and the white country

roads where his brother and he used to wander; and everything seemed so far away and strange, as though it could never be so again.

Late in the afternoon the mail coach from Tyrol arrived, and afterwards at short intervals carriages, also taking the same way to the south. Four times more the brothers had to go down into the courtyard. When they went up the last time dusk had fallen and the little oil lamp that hung down from the ceiling was spluttering. Workmen came in who were employed in a stone quarry near by, and had put up their wooden hutments a hundred yards or so below the inn. Geronimo joined them. Carlo remained alone at the table. He felt as though he had been alone for a very long time.

He heard Geronimo on the other side of the room talking loudly about his young days—indeed, he was nearly shouting—how he still remembered all sorts of things he had seen with his eyes—persons and objects, his father working in the fields, the little garden with the ash tree against the wall, the low house that was theirs, the shoemaker's two little daughters, the vineyard behind the church, even his own boyish face as it had looked at him out of a mirror. How often Carlo had heard it all; to-day he could not bear

it. The words had a different ring; and every one that Geronimo uttered seemed to have a new meaning, and to be aimed at him.

He crept out and again went on to the road which now lay in complete darkness. The rain had stopped. The air was very cold, and Carlo was suddenly tempted to go farther and even farther into the darkness, and at last to lie down somewhere in a ditch, sleep, and never wake again.

All at once he heard the rumble of a carriage, and saw the gleam of two lanterns coming nearer and nearer. In the carriage that passed him sat two men. One of them, who had a small clean-shaven face, started with fright when Carlo's form rose up out of the darkness in the light of the lanterns. Carlo stood still and raised his hat. The carriage and the lights disappeared. Carlo again stood in the profound blackness. Suddenly he felt terrified. For the first time in his life the darkness frightened him. He felt as though he could not bear it for another minute. In some strange way the fear that he felt for himself was confused in his dulled intelligence with an agonizing pity for his blind brother, and he felt impelled to go home.

When he went into the inn-parlour he saw the two

travellers who had passed him on the road, sitting at a table over a bottle of red wine and talking very earnestly together. They hardly looked up when he came in.

At the other table sat Geronimo still among the labourers.

"Where have you been?" said the landlord to him at the door. "Why do you leave your brother alone?"

"What's the matter?" asked Carlo in alarm.

"Geronimo is treating everybody. Of course it's all one to me, but you should remember that bad times will be round again soon."

Carlo went quickly over to his brother and took him by the arm. "Come along," he said.

"What do you want?" shouted Geronimo.

"Come to bed," said Carlo.

"Go away and let me alone! *I* earn the money—I can do what I like with my own money—eh? You can't pocket all of it. You think he gives it all to me! Oh, no! I'm a blind man! But there are people—good people—who say to me, 'I've given your brother twenty francs.'"

The labourers burst out laughing.

"That will do," said Carlo. "Come along!" and he took his brother off, almost dragged him up the stair-

way to the bare garret where they lay. And the whole way Geronimo screamed: "Yes, now it's all come out, now I know all about it. You just wait. Where is she? Where is Maria? Or are you putting it in the Savings Bank for her—eh? I sing for you, I play the guitar, you live on me—and you are a thief!" and he collapsed on to the straw mattress.

A dim light glimmered from the corridor; on the other side of it, the door of the only guest room in the inn stood open, and Maria was putting the beds in order for the night. Carlo stood by his brother and watched him as he lay, with bloated face and bluish lips, his damp hair sticking to his forehead, looking years older than he really was. And slowly he began to understand. His blind brother's mistrust was not a thing of to-day, it must have long been slumbering within him, and he had wanted only the occasion, or perhaps the courage, to express it openly. And everything that Carlo had done for him was in vain: vain was his remorse, vain the sacrifice of his whole life. What should he do now? Should he go on, day after day, for who knows how long, leading him through his endless night, watching over him, begging for him, with no other reward than mistrust and abuse? If his brother looked on him as a thief, any stranger

would do as well or better than himself. It would probably be wisest to leave him alone, and part from him forever. Then Geronimo would learn how unjust he had been, then he would find out for the first time what it means to be betrayed and robbed, abandoned and wretched. And what was he to do? He was not yet old; and if he were alone he could make a start at several things. As an ostler he could always earn his keep anywhere.

But while these thoughts passed through his head, his eyes remained fixed upon his brother, and he suddenly saw him sitting by himself on a stone at the side of a sunlit road, staring with wide-open eyes up to the heaven that could not blind him and groping in the darkness that always hemmed him in. And he felt that as the blind man had no one in the world but himself so he had no one but his brother. He understood that his love for his brother was the whole meaning of his life, and for the first time it flashed upon his mind that only his faith that the blind man returned his love and had forgiven him had made it possible for him to bear his misery so patiently. He could not at a stroke renounce this hope. He felt that he needed his brother just as deeply as his brother needed him. He could not and he would not leave him. He must either

endure his mistrust or find some means to convince the blind man of the groundlessness of his suspicions. . . . If only he could somehow lay his hands on a gold piece. If he could say to the blind man early next morning: "I only put it away so that you wouldn't drink it all with the labourers—or, so that you wouldn't be robbed of it . . ." or something of that sort.

Footsteps approached up the wooden stairs; the travellers were going to their beds. Suddenly an idea flashed through his head: he would knock at the door opposite, tell the strangers the exact truth of what had happened to-day and ask for the twenty francs. And yet he realised at once that it would be futile: they would not believe a word of his story, and he remembered how the pale one had started with terror when he, Carlo, had suddenly appeared out of the darkness in front of the carriage.

He stretched himself out on the straw mattress. It was quite dark in the room. He could hear the labourers talking loudly and then going down the wooden stairs with heavy steps. Soon after that both the gates were shut. Once more the ostler went up the stairs and down again, and then all was still. Carlo could hear nothing but Geronimo's snoring. Soon his thoughts

began to move in the labyrinths of dreams. When he awoke it was still pitch dark. He looked towards the place where the window was; and when he strained his eyes he was aware of a dark grey square in the centre of the impenetrable blackness. Geronimo was still sleeping the heavy sleep of a drunken man, and Carlo thought of the day that was to be the morrow and he shuddered. He thought of the night after that day, of the day after that night, of the future that lay before him, and he was filled with horror of the loneliness that he must face. Why had he not been braver that evening? Why had he not gone to the strangers and asked them for twenty francs? Perhaps they would have taken pity on him. And yet, it was perhaps just as well he had not asked them. But why? . . . He sat up suddenly and felt his heart beating. He now knew why. If they had refused him, he must have been under suspicion, but now . . . he stared at the grey patch that began to shine dimly. . . . This that had come into his head against his will was impossible, quite impossible. . . . The door opposite was fastened, and besides they might wake up. . . . Yes, there it was—that grey luminous patch in the centre of the darkness was the new day.

Carlo got up, as if something were driving him

thither, and laid his forehead against the cold window-pane. Why had he got up? . . . To think it over? . . . To make the attempt? . . . What! . . . It was impossible and besides it was a crime. A crime? . . . What do twenty francs mean to such people who travel a thousand miles for their pleasure? They would not so much as miss it. He went to the door and opened it gently. The other door was opposite—two paces away—shut. Some clothes were hanging from a nail in the door post. Carlo passed his hand over them. . . .

Yes, if people left their purses in their pockets, life would be very simple, soon no one would have to go begging. . . . But the pockets were empty. What could he do now? He had better go back to his room, to the straw mattress. Perhaps there was some better way of getting hold of twenty francs—less dangerous and more honest. If he merely kept back every time a few centimes from what was given them, until he had saved up twenty francs, and then change it all for a gold piece. . . . But how long would that take? . . . Months, perhaps a year. Ah, if he only had the courage. He was still standing in the passage. He looked across at the door. . . . What was that vertical streak from the top to the floor level? Was it possible? The

door was only pushed to, it was not locked? . . . Why was he surprised? . . . For months past it had been impossible to lock the door. How was that? He remembered; it had only been occupied three times last summer, twice by journeymen and once by a tourist who had hurt his foot. The door did not shut; all he needed now was courage—yes, and luck. The worst that could happen to him was that they might both wake up, and even then he could always find an excuse. He peered through the crack into the room. It was still so dark that he could only recognise the outlines of the two figures on the beds. He listened: they were breathing quietly and evenly. Carlo opened the door gently, and entered the room on his bare feet without a sound. Both the beds lay lengthwise against the wall opposite the window. In the centre of the room was a table. Carlo crept up to it. He ran his hand across the top and felt a bunch of keys, a penknife, a small book —no more. Why, of course! . . . How could he imagine they would put their money on the table? Well, he had better go away at once now. . . . And yet, one bold stroke perhaps, and all would be well. He approached the bed nearest to the door. Something was lying on the chair—he felt for it—it was a revolver. . . . Carlo started. . . . Perhaps he had better keep

it. Why had the man put his revolver ready? If he awoke and noticed him . . . No, he would simply say: "Three o'clock, sir; time to get up!" and he left the revolver where it lay.

He crept further into the room. On the other chair, among some underclothes . . . God! there it was . . . a purse . . . he held it in his hand. . . . At that instant he heard a faint creak. With a quick movement he lay down full length at the foot of the bed. . . . Another creak—a sound of deep breathing, a clearing of the throat—then all was silent, profoundly silent. Carlo stayed where he was on the floor, with the purse in his hand, and waited. Not a sound or a movement. Already the pale light of dawn began to fill the room. Carlo did not dare to stand up: he crawled along the floor towards the door, which was wide enough open to let him through; he crawled right out into the passage, and not until then did he get up slowly, drawing a deep breath.

He opened the purse: it had three compartments, in the left and right of which were only small silver coins. Carlo then opened the middle one, which was shut by a catch of its own, and felt three twenty-franc pieces. For an instant he thought of taking two of them, but he quickly put the temptation from him,

took out one gold piece only and shut the purse. Then he knelt down, looked through the crack into the room, in which all was absolutely still, and gave the purse a push so that it slid under the second bed. When the stranger awoke he must of course think that it had fallen down from the chair. Carlo got up slowly. The floor creaked slightly, and at that moment he heard a voice from within: "What is it? What's the matter?" Carlo hastily made two steps backward, holding his breath, and slipped into his own room. He was safe now, and he listened. . . . The bed in the room opposite creaked again, and then all was still. Between his fingers he held the piece of gold. He had done it! He had the twenty francs and now he could say to his brother "You see now I'm not a thief," and to-day they could start on their wanderings again—southwards to Bormio, then on through the Valtelline . . . To Tirano . . . to Edole . . . to Breno, to Lake Iseo, as they had done last year. . . . There would be nothing suspicious about it, for the day before yesterday he had said to the landlord, "We're going down south in a few days."

It was growing lighter, and the whole room glimmered in the grey dawn. Oh, if only Geronimo would wake up soon! It was so pleasant walking in the early

morning. They would start before sunrise. Good morning to the landlord, the ostler, and Maria, and then away. . . . And not until they were two hours distant, and near the valley, would he tell Geronimo.

Geronimo stretched himself and turned over. Carlo called to him, "Geronimo!"

"Well, what is it?" and he sat up, propping himself on his elbows.

"Geronimo, we must get up."

"Why?" and he turned his dead eyes towards his brother. Carlo knew that he was calling to mind what had happened yesterday, but he also knew that his brother would not say another word about it until he was drunk again.

"It's cold, Geronimo; we must go. It won't get any better here, and I think we should go. We could be in Boladore by midday."

Geronimo heaved himself up. The noises of the awakening house were already audible. Down in the yard the landlord was talking to the ostler. Carlo stood up and went downstairs. He was always awake early and often went out into the road before the dawn had broken. He went up to the landlord and said: "We're going off."

"So soon?" said the landlord.

"Yes, it's bitter cold standing here in the yard, and the wind goes through you."

"Well, remember me to Baldetti when you get to Bormio, and tell him not to forget to send me the oil."

"All right. And . . . how much for our beds last night?"

"That's all right, Carlo," said the landlord. "I'll present your brother with the twenty centimes. I listened to him too. Good-bye."

"Thanks," said Carlo. "But we aren't in such a hurry as all that. We'll see you when you come back from the sheds. Bormio won't move, I don't suppose." He laughed and went up the wooden stairs.

Geronimo stood in the middle of the room and said: "Well, I'm ready to go."

"Right," said Carlo.

He took their few belongings from an old cupboard that stood in a corner of the room and packed them in a bundle. Then he said: "A fine day, but very cold."

"I know it," said Geronimo, and they left the room together.

"Go quietly," said Carlo, "the two people who came last night are sleeping there." They walked carefully

down the stairs. "The landlord asked me to say good-bye to you," said Carlo. "He gave us the twenty centimes for last night. He's gone out down to the sheds and won't be back for two hours. But we shall see him again next year."

Geronimo did not answer. They went out on to the main road which lay before them in the pale light of dawn. Carlo took his brother's left arm, and both walked in silence down towards the valley. After a short stretch they reached the place where the road becomes a series of long-drawn-out curves. Mists rose up to meet them, and above them the heights seemed to be engulfed in cloud. And Carlo thought: "Now I will tell him."

But Carlo did not say a word; he took the piece of gold out of his pocket and handed it to his brother. The latter took it between the fingers of his right hand, passed it over his cheek and his forehead, and at last nodded. "I knew it," said he.

"Yes," said Carlo, and looked at his brother with something like surprise.

"Even if the stranger hadn't said anything about it, I should still have known it."

"Yes," said Carlo helplessly. "But you understand why, among all that crowd up there—I was afraid that

you would get rid of it all at once. And, Geronimo, I thought it was time you bought a new coat for yourself, and a shirt and some shoes, I think. So that was why I . . ."

The blind man shook his head vigorously, "Why should I?" and he passed a hand over his coat. "Good enough, warm enough; now we shall soon be in the south."

Carlo could not understand why Geronimo did not seem to be glad, and did not say he was sorry. And he went on: "Didn't I do right, Geronimo? Now we have got it, haven't we? If I'd told you up there, who knows. . . . I was quite right not to tell you, surely I was."

Then Geronimo screamed out: "Stop telling lies, Carlo, I've had enough of it."

Carlo stood still and let go of his brother's arm. "I'm not telling lies."

"I know very well you are! You're always doing it. . . . You've told me hundreds of lies. . . . You wanted to keep this for yourself as well, but you were afraid, that's what it was!"

Carlo bowed his head and said nothing. He took the blind man's arm again and went on. It hurt him that Geronimo should speak so but he was

quite astonished that he did not feel more upset.

The mists parted. After a long silence Geronimo said: "It is getting warm." He spoke indifferently, in a matter-of-fact sort of way, as he had done a hundred times before, and at that moment Carlo felt that nothing had altered for Geronimo. For him he had always been a thief.

"Are you hungry yet?" he asked.

Geronimo nodded, and immediately took a piece of bread and cheese out of his coat pocket and began to eat. And they went on.

The mail from Bormio passed them. "Going down already?" the driver shouted to them. Then came other carriages, all going upwards.

"I can feel the air from the valley," said Geronimo, and at that moment, after a sharp turn, the Valtelline lay at their feet.

Truly nothing had changed, thought Carlo. . . . Now I have actually stolen for him, and all to no purpose.

The mist below them was growing thinner, the sun's rays tore holes in it. And Carlo thought: "Perhaps it was stupid to leave the inn so soon. . . . The purse is under the bed, which is in any case suspicious. But what did it all matter? Nothing worse could hap-

pen to him. His brother, the light of whose eyes he had destroyed, thought he had robbed him, thought he had done so for years, and would always think so—what worse could happen to him?

There below him lay the great white hotel, bathed in the radiance of the morning, and deeper down, where the valley began to widen out, the straggling village lay outstretched. The two went on in silence, and Carlo's hand still lay on the blind man's arm. They went past the grounds of the hotel, and on the terrace Carlo saw the guests sitting in light summer clothes over their breakfast.

"Where do you want to stop?" asked Carlo.

"At the 'Eagle,' of course, where we always do."

When they got to the little inn at the end of the village they went inside. They sat down in the bar-room and called for some wine.

"Why are you so early this year?" asked the landlord.

Carlo was rather alarmed by this question.

"Is it so early? It's the 10th or 11th of September, isn't it?"

"It was much later than this when you came down last year."

"It's so cold up above," said Carlo. "We were

frozen last night. By the way, I was to tell you not to forget to send up the oil."

The air in the bar-room was heavy and thick. A strange restlessness fell upon Carlo: he wanted to be out in the open air again, on the main road that led to Tirano, to Edole, to Lake Iseo—far away into the distance. Suddenly he stood up.

"Are we going already?" asked Geronimo.

"We want to be in Boladore by midday—the carriages stop for a midday rest at the 'Goat,' it is a good place."

And they went. The barber, Benozzi, stood smoking in front of his shop. "Good morning," he shouted to them. "Well, what's it like up there? I expect it snowed last night, didn't it?"

"Yes, it did," said Carlo and hurried on.

The village lay behind them. The white ribbon of the road wound among meadows and vineyards and along the rushing river. The sky was blue and still. "Why did I do it?" thought Carlo, and he glanced sidelong at the blind man. "His face looks just the same. He has always believed it—I have always been alone—and he has always hated me," and it seemed to him as though he were walking and walking on-

ward under a heavy load that he could not shake off; as though he could see the darkness through which Geronimo was walking at his side, while all the roads lay shining in the sunlight.

And they went on and on, hour after hour. From time to time Geronimo sat down upon a milestone, or they both leaned against the parapet of a bridge, to get some rest. They came to another village. Before the inn carriages had stopped; travellers had got out and were walking up and down, but the two beggars did not stay. Out once more on to the open road. The sun rose higher and higher: it must be near noon. It was a day like a thousand others.

"The tower of Boladore," said Geronimo. Carlo looked up. He was surprised how accurately Geronimo could calculate distances: the tower of Boladore had in fact appeared on the horizon. Far away in the distance someone was coming towards them. It looked to Carlo as though he had been sitting by the roadside and had suddenly got up. The form came nearer. Then Carlo saw that it was a gendarme, one of those they so often met on the road. None the less Carlo was slightly alarmed. But as the man approached he recognised him and was reassured. It was Pietro Tenelli. Only

last May the two beggars had sat with him in Ragazzi's inn in Morignone and heard him tell a dreadful story of how he had been nearly stabbed to death by a brigand.

"Someone has stopped," said Geronimo.

"Tenelli, the gendarme," said Carlo.

By now they had come up to him.

"Good morning, Herr Tenelli," said Carlo, and stopped.

"It so happens," said the gendarme, "that I've got to take both of you to the station at Boladore."

"Eh!" cried the blind man.

Carlo paled. "How is it possible?" he thought. "It can't be on that account. They can't know about that here yet."

"It seems to be on your way," said the gendarme, laughing, "so we may as well go together."

"Why don't you say something, Carlo?" asked Geronimo.

"Yes, yes, of course. . . . But, please, sir, how is it possible? . . . What have we . . . or rather what have I . . . truly I don't know. . . ."

"Well, there it is. Perhaps you're innocent. How can I tell? In any case we've had a telegram at the

station that we're to stop you because you're suspected, strongly suspected, of stealing some money up above there. Of course it's quite possible you didn't. So, come on!"

"Why don't you say something, Carlo?" asked Geronimo.

"Yes, yes . . . of course. . . ."

"Oh, come along. There's no sense in standing here on the road. It's getting too hot. We shall be there in an hour. On with you!"

Carlo touched Geronimo's arm in his usual way, and they walked slowly on, the gendarme behind them.

"Carlo, why don't you speak?" asked Geronimo again.

"But what do you want me to say, Geronimo; what can I say? It will all come right. I myself don't know . . ." And suddenly it flashed across his mind: "Shall I tell him before we are brought into court? . . . No, it's no good. The gendarme would hear us. . . . Well, what does it matter? I shall tell the truth in court. 'Your Honor,' I shall say, 'this isn't an ordinary theft. This was how it happened. . . .' And then he struggled to find the words to make his affair clear and intelligible to the court. "A gentleman down

over the Pass yesterday . . . he may have been mad . . . or perhaps he was just mistaken . . . and this man . . ."

What nonsense! Who would believe it? . . . They would not even let him get so far. No one could, that foolish story . . . not even Geronimo. And he glanced sidelong at him. From old habit, the blind man's head moved up and down, as if keeping time to his walk, but his face was set, and his empty eyes stared into vacancy. And Carlo suddenly knew what kind of thoughts were moving behind that forehead. . . ." 'So that's how it is,' Geronimo must be thinking. . . . 'Carlo steals not only from me but from other people too. . . . Well, he can do it all right: he has eyes that can see and he uses them.' Yes, that's what Geronimo is thinking, sure enough. They won't find any money on me, but that won't help me—neither with the judge nor with Geronimo. They'll lock me up, and him too. . . . Yes, him as well as me, as he's got the money."

And he could think no more, he felt so confused. It seemed as though he no longer understood a single thing about the whole affair and knew one thing alone: that he would gladly go to prison for a year or ten years, if only Geronimo might know that he, Carlo, had become a thief for his sake alone.

And suddenly Geronimo stood still, and Carlo had to stop also.

"Now what's the matter?" said the gendarme irritably. "Get on, do!" But he saw with surprise that the blind man had let fall his guitar, raised his arms, and was groping with both hands for his brother's cheeks. Then he brought his lips close to Carlo's mouth, who did not at first realise what was happening, and kissed him.

"Are you crazy?" asked the gendarme. "Come along, both of you. I don't want to stand here and get roasted."

Geronimo picked up the guitar, without uttering a word. Carlo took a deep breath and again laid his hand on the blind man's arm. Was it possible? Was his brother no longer angry with him? Did he at last understand? And he looked at his brother with a doubtful sidelong glance.

"Come on!" shouted the gendarme, "I'm sick of this," and he gave Carlo a jab in the ribs.

And Carlo, still guiding his brother with a firm grip on his arm, went on once more: and he walked at a much faster pace. For he saw Geronimo smile a gentle radiant smile that he had never seen on his brother's face since the days of his boyhood. And

Carlo smiled too. He felt as though nothing evil could happen to him any more—neither in the police-court, nor anywhere in the world. He had found his brother again—or, rather, he had found him for the first time.

ANDREAS THAMEYER'S LAST LETTER

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I CANNOT POSSIBLY GO ON LIVING; FOR SO LONG AS I am alive people will despise me and no one will realise the truth. But the truth is that my wife was faithful—I swear it by all that I hold sacred, and I seal it with my death.

I have read a number of books dealing with these difficult and mysterious matters, and if there are persons who find such things essentially incredible, on the other hand there are scholars of importance who are entirely convinced, and I propose here and now to bring forward some instances that to every unprejudiced person must seem irresistible.

Malebranche relates that a certain woman, upon the occasion of the canonisation ceremonies of the blessed Pius, looked at his portrait so intently that the boy which she soon after brought into the world was exactly like the saint; his face showed all the tired lines of old age, his arms were crossed over his chest, his eyes turned up to heaven, and, over and above all this, the saint's voluminous cowl appeared

in the form of a birthmark on his shoulder. But if, in spite of the authority of the witness, a disciple of the famous philosopher, Descartes, anyone should consider this story insufficiently confirmed, perhaps he will be satisfied with Martin Luther's evidence. Luther, in fact—as may be read in his table-talk—knew a citizen of Wittenberg with a head like a skull, and it was proved that the mother of this unfortunate man had been greatly shocked by the sight of a corpse during her pregnancy. But the story that seems to me the most significant and offers no reasonable ground for doubt is recorded by Heliodorous in the *Libri Aethiopicorum*. According to this esteemed author, the Queen Persina, after a childless marriage of ten years, bore her husband, Hydaspes, king of the Aethiopians, a white daughter, which, from fear of her husband's probable wrath, she caused to be exposed immediately after its birth: but with the child was a girdle on which was set out the true cause of this mysterious occurrence. In the garden of the royal palace, where the queen received the embraces of her dusky consort, there were magnificent marble statues of Greek gods and goddesses, which had been the objects of Persina's enraptured gaze. But the power of the spirit can go still further, and these views are not merely confined

to the superstitious and the ignorant, as is proved by the following circumstance which took place in France in the year 1637. A woman gave birth to a boy after four years' absence from her husband, and she swore that at the appropriate interval before its birth she had dreamt with great vividness that her husband had embraced her with unusual ardour. The doctors and midwives of Montpellier declared on oath that the ocurrence was possible, and the Courts of Havre conferred on the boy all the rights of legitimate birth. I find a further instance in Hamberg's *Mysterious Natural Events*, page 74—to the effect that a woman, who in the seventh month of her pregnancy had gone with her husband and her mother to see a lion-tamer, gave birth to a child with a lion's head. Moreover, I have read a story—which may be found in Limböck's *On the Effect of Shock on Pregnant Women*—about a child being born with a large scar on its cheek because the mother had seen the house opposite burn down a few weeks before the event. And other highly remarkable matters are to be found in the same book. As I write this, it lies before me on the table, and I have just been looking through it; these are confirmed and scientifically established occurrences, and what has occurred to me, or rather to my dear wife—who has been

faithful to me as sure as I am sitting here now—is equally well established.

Will you forgive me, my dear, if I decide that I must die? You see I cannot help it. It is only from love of you that I am going to die, because I cannot bear these people to despise and mock both you and me. Then they will indeed stop laughing, then they will understand it all, as I understand it. And you, who are to find me for her and find this letter for her, must know that while I write this she is sleeping in the room near by, quietly sleeping, the sleep that only a good conscience can bring: and her child —our child, now a fortnight old, is lying in the cradle near the bed and is also sleeping. And before I leave the house I shall go in and kiss my wife and my child on the forehead without awakening them. I am writing this all down so carefully that no one may think I am mad. . . . No, I have considered the matter well, and I am perfectly composed. As soon as I have finished this letter I shall go out in the darkness of the night through the empty streets, farther and farther, to where I so often used to go with my wife in the first years of our marriage—to Dornbach—and farther still, into the forest. Yes, I have considered it all, and I am in complete possession of my senses.

This is the story. My name is Andreas Thameyer, I am an official in the Austrian Savings Bank, aged 33, living at Hernals, No. 64 Hauptstrasse, married four years ago. I knew my wife for seven years before we were married, and she refused two proposals because she loved me and wished to wait for me: a Kommissär with a salary of 1,800 gulden, and a very handsome young medical student from Trieste who was lodging with her parents—mark this well! She refused them for my sake, although I was neither handsome nor rich, and although our marriage had to be put off from year to year. And now people are saying that this woman has betrayed me—she who waited patiently for me for seven years! Really, they are too stupid and despicable—they cannot see into our inner selves, as I wish I could make mine clear; malicious, coarse brutes! However, now they will all hold their tongues. . . . Yes, now they will all be saying, "We were in the wrong, we now realise that your wife was true to you, and you had no need to kill yourself." But I say to you, I had! For so long as I was alive you would still have despised us, all of you. Only one person was decent and kind, and that was old Doctor Brauner. . . . Yes, he told me at once. Before he took me in he said to me: "My dear Thameyer, don't be

frightened, and don't excite yourself or your wife. Such things have often happened. I will bring you Limböck's book to-morrow, and others on the effects of shock during pregnancy." These books lie before me now, and I must ask my relatives to be so good as to see that the excellent Doctor Brauner gets his books back with my sincerest thanks. I have no further instructions to leave behind me. My will was made long ago, I have no reason for altering it, as my wife was true to me and the child that she bore me is my child. The fact that its skin is so strange a colour I shall now explain in the simplest manner. Only malevolence and ignorance can reject this explanation, and I venture to maintain that if we lived among people who were not malicious and stupid I should not need to die, for everyone would accept it. But they will not, and they smile and laugh.

Herr Gustav Rengelhofer, my wife's uncle, to whom I have always shown the greatest respect, winked in a manner very offensive to me when we first saw my child; and my own mother—well, she pressed my hand in a very peculiar way, as though I stood in need of sympathy; and my colleagues at the office whispered together when I came in yesterday; and the concierge, to whose children I gave my old worn-out

watch at Christmas—a watch-case of that kind has still some use as a toy—the concierge stifled a laugh as I passed him yesterday. Our cook put on a drunken-looking grin, and the grocer at the corner has already stared after me three or four times—just now he stopped in his doorway and said to an old lady: "That's him." And to show how quickly these ridiculous rumours have spread, people whom I do not know have heard of it, I do not know how. When I was driving home yesterday in an omnibus I heard three old women inside talking about me; I heard my Christian name quite clearly. I was standing outside by the conductor.

For this reason I ask in a voice that all may hear (I use the expression advisedly although this is a written statement)—I ask, What am I to do? What else can I do? I cannot say to everybody: "Read Hamberg's *Wonders of Nature,* and Limböck's remarkable work *On the Effect of Shock on Pregnant Women.*" I cannot go on my knees to them and say: "Don't be so cruel: you *must* understand. . . . My wife has always been faithful to me!"

She had a shock when she went to the Zoological Gardens with her sister last August, when those unpleasant black natives had a camp there. I can give

my oath she had a shock, for what happened was this. On that day, and for a few days previously, I had been in the country with my parents—my father, in fact, was ill, very ill . . . so much so that he actually died a few weeks afterwards. However, that is incidental. So Anna was by herself. And when I got back I found her in bed—my absence had been too much for her, perhaps. Anyway, there she was. And I had only been away for three days. My wife loved me as much as that. So I had to sit down on her bed and get her to tell me how she had spent those three days. And without my having questioned her she told me everything and I set it down here with the exactness called for by the circumstances. On Monday she had spent the whole morning at home, but in the afternoon she went with Fritzi—as we call her unmarried sister, her real name is Friederike—she went into town with Fritzi to make some purchases. Fritzi is engaged to an excellent young man who has a position in Germany, in a large mercantile house in Bremen, and Fritzi is soon to join him to be married. . . . However, this too is by the way, I quite realise that. On Tuesday my wife spent the entire day at home as it was raining. It rained that day in the country, at my parents' house, as I can well remember. Then came

Wednesday. That day Fritzi and my wife went in the evening to the Zoological Gardens where there was a nigger camp. I might mention here that I myself saw these people later on, in September—I went there one Sunday evening with Rudolf Bittner and his wife: Anna absolutely refused to go, she could not forget her terrible experience on that fatal Wednesday. She told me she had never felt such terror as that evening when she was alone near the nigger camp. . . . Alone, because Fritzi had suddenly got lost. . . . I cannot conceal this fact. I will, indeed, say nothing against Fritzi as this is my last letter; but it seems not out of place to give Fritzi a warning not to be untrue to her fiancé for he, as an honourable man himself, would be very unhappy about it. Unfortunately, however, it remains a fact that on that evening Herr . . . though why should I mention his name here? . . . To cut the matter short, that evening Fritzi lost herself in the company of this gentleman whom I know very well, and whose reputation is none of the best, although he is married; and my poor wife was suddenly alone. It was a misty evening, such as we often have in late summer: for my part I never go out into the Prater in the evening without an overcoat. . . . I remember there are often grey vapours

overhanging the meadows, in which the lights are reflected. . . . Well, it was just such an evening that Wednesday; Fritzi had disappeared, and my Anna was alone—quite suddenly alone. . . . It is quite understandable that she was overcome with awful terror at the sight of these gigantic creatures with their glittering eyes and great black beards. . . . For three whole hours she waited for Fritzi, and kept on hoping that she would come back; but at last the gates were on the point of being shut and she had to go. Thus it happened. Anna told me all this in the early morning, as I sat on her bed, as I have mentioned before. . . . She had flung her arms round my neck and was trembling; her eyes were all clouded, so that I was quite frightened, and on that day I knew as little as she did, what I came to know later. For had I known that she already carried our child under her heart, I would never, never have allowed her to walk with Fritzi in the Prater on a misty evening, and expose herself to all sorts of risks. Anything may be a risk for a woman in her condition. . . . Of course, if Fritzi had not lost herself, my wife would never have got into such a state of terror: that was the worst part of it—how she was left, alone and trembling for Fritzi. . . . Well, it's all over now, and I would not throw a

stone at anyone. But I have written all this down, for I wish the whole affair to be made absolutely clear. If I had not, who knows whether those contemptible people might not have gone on forever saying, "He killed himself because his wife betrayed him." . . . No, my friends, once more I say it, my wife is faithful to me and the child she bore is mine. And I love them both until my last moment. It is only you who are driving me to my death—all those of you who are too contemptible or too malignant to believe or to understand. And the more I appealed to you and tried to make you see the scientific explanation of what has happened—I know you—the more you would jeer and laugh, if not to my face, then behind my back—or you would even say: "Thameyer is mad."

Well, my worthy friends, I have deprived you of that pleasure: I am dying for my conviction, for the truth, and above all for the honour of my wife; for when I am dead you will not despise my wife, nor laugh at me: you will realise that such things do happen, just as they are recorded by Hamberg, Heliodorous, Malebranche, Welsenburg, Preuss, Limböck, and the rest. And you, my dearest mother, you should not have pressed by hand as if I needed sympathy! Now you will ask my wife's forgiveness—I know you will.

Now, I think, I have no more to say. It is striking one. Good-night, my dear ones. Now I am going once more into the next room to kiss my wife and child for the last time—and then I shall go. Farewell.

REDEGONDA'S DIARY

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YESTERDAY NIGHT, AS I WAS SITTING FOR A WHILE on a bench in the park on my way home, I suddenly saw a man of whose presence I had been quite unaware leaning back in the opposite corner. As there is no lack of empty benches at this late hour, the appearance of this nocturnal neighbour struck me as rather suspicious, and I was just about to make a move when the stranger, who was wearing a long grey overcoat and yellow gloves, raised his hat, addressed me by name, and wished me good evening. And I recognised him with a feeling of agreeable surprise. It was Dr. Gottfried Wehwald, a well-mannered young gentleman, with, indeed, a certain distinction of demeanour, which seemed to be, to him at least, a source of perpetual silent satisfaction. About four years before he had been transferred from the offices of the Vienna municipality to a small country town in lower Austria, but emerged from time to time among his friends at the café, where he was always greeted

with that restrained warmth that seemed appropriate to his elegant reserve. So I thought it better, although I had not seen him since Christmas, to display no sort of surprise at the time and place of our meeting; I returned his greeting politely but with an air of indifference, and prepared to start a conversation as between men of the world who must not show the slightest surprise at a casual meeting in Australia, when, with an impatient wave of the hand, he remarked shortly:

"I beg your pardon, my dear fellow, but my time is limited, and I have come here specially to tell you a rather singular story, provided, of course, that you are willing to hear it."

I was rather taken aback by this address; however, I said I was quite ready to listen, but I could not help expressing my surprise that Dr. Wehwald had not come to see me at the café; how he had succeeded in finding me at night here in the park; and why I should be selected for the honour of listening to his story.

"The answer to the first two questions," he replied, with unusual sharpness, "will appear in the course of my narration. My choice fell on you, my dear fellow" (as he continued to address me), "be-

cause I knew you were something of an author, and I thought I might rely on my strange but rather unconventional communication being tolerably reproduced and published."

I made some deprecatory remark, whereupon Dr. Wehwald, with a singular twitch of the nostrils, began without further preamble:

"The heroine of my story is called Redegonda. She was the wife of a cavalry captain, Baron T., of the X Dragoons, then quartered in our little town of Z." (He actually used these letters, although not only the name of the small town, but for reasons that will soon appear, both the captain's name and the number of the dragoon regiment could be no secret to me.) "Redegonda," proceeded Dr. Wehwald, "was a woman of extraordinary beauty, and I fell in love with her, as the phrase goes, at first sight. Unfortunately, I had no opportunity of making her personal acquaintance, as the officers scarcely mixed at all with the civil population and extended this exclusiveness, in a manner that was almost offensive, to those who, like myself, were members of the administrative services. So I only saw Redegonda from afar, alone or by her husband's side, and often in the company of other officers and officers' wives, walking through the streets.

Many a time I caught sight of her at a window of her house on the Central Square, or saw her in the evening driving in a jolting carriage to the little theatre, when I had the satisfaction of looking up from the pit to her box, which was much frequented by young officers in the intervals. Sometimes it seemed as though she condescended to notice me. But her glance flashed on me for so brief an instant and then passed that I could draw no conclusions from it. I had already given up the hope of ever being able to lay my homage at her feet when one marvellous autumn morning she came upon me quite unexpectedly in the small park-like wood that stretches from the eastern gate of the town far into the country. With an imperceptible smile she passed me by—perhaps, in fact, she did not notice me —and had soon disappeared behind the yellowing foliage. I had let her pass without even considering whether I could have greeted her or addressed so much as a word to her; and now that she had disappeared from my ken I did not think of regretting that I had not tried, since I could hardly have expected any success. But then something singular happened. I felt myself suddenly impelled to imagine what would have been the result if I had found the courage to go up and speak to her. And, in my fancy,

I saw Redegonda, so far from repulsing me, not trying to conceal her satisfaction at my boldness, and in the course of a lively conversation freely lamenting the emptiness of her existence and the inferiority of her society, and expressing her pleasure at having found in me an understanding and sympathetic soul. And so encouraging was the look she gave me at parting that on the evening of the same day—all this, including the parting glance existing only in my imagination—when I saw her again in her box, I felt just as though a precious secret made an invisible bond between us. You will not be surprised, my dear fellow, that I, who had received so extraordinary a proof of the power of my imagination, was careful we should soon meet again in the same way, and that upon each occasion the intercourse should grow more friendly, more confidential, and more ardent, until one lovely day, under the now leafless branches, the adored one sank into my longing arms. Then I gave rein to my delicious frenzy and it was not long before Redegonda visited me in my small lodging at the far end of the town, and I knew such intoxicating bliss the like of which paltry reality had never brought to me. We did not lack dangers, either, to season our adventure. It happened once in the course of the winter that the captain

galloped past us as we were driving, covered with furs, along a country road into the night, and already there arose in my mind a foreboding of what was soon to come upon us with the full weight of destiny. In early spring it was reported in the town that the dragoon regiment, to which Redegonda's husband belonged, was to be transferred to Galicia. My—nay, our—despair was boundless. Nothing that could enter lovers' minds in such extremity, nothing was left unsaid: we would fly together, die together, or sadly acquiesce to the inevitable. However, the last evening came without our having made a definite resolution. I was expecting Redegonda in my flower-decked room. So as to be prepared for all emergencies my trunk was packed, my revolver loaded, and my farewell letters written. That, my dear fellow, is actual fact. For so entirely had I been mastered by my madness that I not merely thought that, on this, the last evening before the regiment went off, my mistress would be able to come, but I actually expected her. I could not, as of old, summon up her shadow picture, dream the heavenly creature into my arms: no, I felt as though something unaccountable, perhaps frightful, was holding her at home. A hundred times I went to the door, listened down the stairs, looked out of the

window, strained my eyes to see Redegonda approaching along the street. Yes, in my impatience, I was on the point of rushing forth to find Redegonda, clasp her to me, and, with the right of the lover and his beloved, claim her from her husband—until at last, stricken as though by fever, I sank down upon my divan. Then suddenly—it was near midnight—the bell rang outside. For the ring at the bell, you must understand, was no longer imagination. It rang a second and third time, and its tinkle, shrill and not to be denied, awoke me to the full consciousness of reality. But at the same moment, as I recognised that until this evening my adventure had been but a strange succession of dreams, I felt a rash hope awake within me—a hope that Redegonda, gripped in her very soul by the power of my longing, had been drawn and driven to my house, and now stood outside upon my threshold, and that in another minute I should hold her very self in my arms. In this delicious expectation I went to the door and opened it. But it was not Redegonda that stood before me, it was Redegonda's husband: he himself, as real and as living as you who sit at the other end of this bench, and he stared into my face.

"There was, of course, nothing for me to do but to let him come into my room, where I invited him to sit

down. But he remained standing, and, with an expression of indescribable contempt on his lips, he said:

"'You are expecting Redegonda. Unfortunately she is prevented from coming. She is, in fact, dead.'

"'Dead!' I repeated, and the world stood still. Unmoved, the captain continued: 'An hour ago I found her sitting at her writing-table, with this small book in front of her, which, to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding, I have brought with me. She probably died of fright when I came so unexpectedly into the room. These lines here are the last she wrote. Look!'

"He handed me a small open book, bound in violet leather, and I read the following words:

"'Now I am leaving my home forever; my lover waits for me.'

"I merely nodded slowly, as if in confirmation.

"'You will have guessed,' continued the captain, 'that what you have in your hand is Redegonda's diary. Perhaps you will have the goodness to look through it, so as to make any attempt at denial useless.' I looked it through—no, I read it. I read it for nearly an hour, while the captain sat motionless on the divan; I read the whole history of our love—that sweet and marvellous tale in all its details: the autumn morning when I first spoke to Redegonda in the

wood; our first kiss; our walks; our trips into the country; our hours of bliss in my flower-decked room; our plans for death and flight; our happiness and our despair. All was there, set down in those pages, all that had never happened to me in reality, and yet exactly as it had happened in my imagination. And I did not find that at all so inexplicable as you, my dear fellow, seem clearly to find it at this moment. For it came over me that Redegonda had loved me as I had loved her, and that she had thus acquired the mysterious power of realising in her own imagination the adventures that took place in mine. And since she, being a woman, was nearer than I to the springs of life, where desire and fulfillment are one, she was probably profoundly convinced that she had really felt and done all that was set down in her little violet book. But there was yet another thing that I thought possible: that the whole diary was nothing more nor less than a deliberate revenge upon me, a revenge for my irresolution in not letting my, and her, dreams become a reality; yes, that her sudden death was the work of her own will, and that it had been her intention in this way to get the treacherous diary into her deceived husband's hands. But I had no time to dwell upon these problems, for the captain there could be

only one—the natural—explanation, and I placed myself at his disposal in the words appropriate to such occasions. . . ."

"Without attempting . . ."

"To deny anything?" interrupted Dr. Wehwald sharply. "Oh, even if such an attempt had had the slightest prospect of success, it would have seemed to me deplorable. For I felt myself entirely responsible for all the consequences of an adventure that I had wanted to experience, though I had been too cowardly to try. 'I am anxious,' said the captain, 'to dispose of our business before Redegonda's death is known. It is now one in the morning: our witnesses can meet at three, and by five o'clock the affair should be over.' I again nodded as a sign of understanding. The captain departed with a cold salutation. I put my papers in order, went out of the house, fetched two acquaintances of mine from the office out of their beds—one was a count—told them no more than was necessary to get them to despatch the affair as quickly as possible, and then walked up and down the Central Square, opposite the darkened windows behind which I knew Redegonda's body was lying, and I had the clear conviction that the fulfillment of my destiny was upon me. At five in the morning, in the little wood,

quite near the place where I could have spoken to Redegonda the first time, the captain and I faced each other, pistol in hand."

"And you killed him?"

"No. My bullet grazed his temple. But he shot me through the heart. I fell dead on the spot, as the phrase goes."

"What!" I gasped, turning a perplexed glance on my singular neighbour. But there was no one. Dr. Wehwald was no longer sitting in the corner of the bench. Indeed, I have reasons for thinking that he had never sat there. On the other hand I at once remembered that in the café yesterday evening there had been much talk of a duel in which our friend, Dr. Wehwald, had been shot by a cavalry captain of the name of Teuerheim. The circumstance that Frau Redegonda, on the very same day, had vanished into space with a young lieutenant of the regiment, roused the company, out of their serious mood, to a sort of melancholic amusement, and they were all inclined to suspect that Dr. Wehwald, whom we had all known as the paragon of correctness, discretion, and refinement, had—quite in his own style—half willingly and half against his will, paid for another's happiness with his own death.

As regards the appearance of Dr. Wehwald on the park bench, it would certainly have considerably gained in impressiveness and singularity if it had been forthcoming before the chivalrous end of the original. And I will not deny that it did occur to me to heighten the effect of my narrative by this quite trifling alteration. But after brief reflection I shrank before the possibility of the charge that the description of such a mystery provided fresh evidence for spiritualism and other dangerous matters, and I foresaw enquiries as to whether the story was true or fictitious and whether I believed such happenings were possible or not—and I should have had before me the painful alternative of figuring, in accordance with my answer, as an occultist or a fraud. Finally, therefore, I thought it better to set down the history of my nocturnal encounter exactly as it happened, fully realising the danger that many people will, even so, doubt its truth —in that widespread mistrust which authors, though with less reason than most other people, always seem to provoke.

DEAD GABRIEL

DEAD GABRIEL

SHE DANCED PAST HIM ON THE ARM OF A MAN whom he did not know, nodded her head very slightly, and smiled. Ferdinand bowed more deeply than usual. So she is here, he thought to himself in surprise, and suddenly felt a new sense of freedom. If Irene, only a month after Gabriel's death, can bring herself to wear a ball dress and glide round a brightly lit room with an agreeable stranger, he felt he might cease reproaching himself for appearing at such a place of public gaiety. For the first time this evening, after a month's quiet seclusion, he had been seized by the desire to go out into the world once more. To his parents' pleasant surprise, who had scarcely been able to understand their son's deep depression over the death of a merely casual acquaintance, he had appeared at dinner in his evening clothes, announced his intention of going to the Law Students' Ball, and soon departed with the comfortable sensation of having given the kind old

people a small pleasure without much trouble to himself.

In the cab that drove him to the Sophiensäle he still felt a slight sinking at the heart. He thought of the night when he had looked down from Wilhelmine's window and seen a dark form pacing up and down by the park railings, of the morning when, while still lying in bed, he had found the news of Gabriel's suicide in the paper, of the moment when Wilhelmine had shown him the pathetic letter in which Gabriel, without a word of reproach, had taken eternal leave of her. Even while he was going up the broad staircase, and in the ballroom itself, amid the din of the orchestra, he did not feel more cheerful: only Irene's glance had put him into a brighter mood.

He had known Irene now for several years without having taken any special interest in her, and to him, as to all frequenters of the house, her inclinanation for Gabriel had remained no secret. One evening when Ferdinand, shortly before Christmas, had been at her parents' house, she had sung a few songs in her pleasant husky voice. Gabriel had accompanied her upon the piano, and Ferdinand particularly remembered asking himself why that worthy young man did not marry that charming, simple creature, instead

of hanging on to the magnificent Wilhelmine, who would be sure to betray him very soon. That he himself was designed by fate to fulfill this presentiment, Ferdinand, of course, had then not the least suspicion. So far as his share of the guilt of Gabriel's death was concerned, Anastasius Trehenhof, who understood all things earthly and divine, had at once convinced him that his part in the whole situation had not been that of an individual but of a social force, and that the matter was possibly one for mild regret but in no way an occasion for serious remorse. Still, it had been a painful moment for Ferdinand when he stood with Wilhelmine at Gabriel's grave, on which still lay the withered garlands, and his companion suddenly turned to him, as he stood there with the tears streaming down his cheeks, and said, in the tone he had heard so often on the stage, "Yes, you miserable creature, you may well weep now." An hour later, of course, she swore that better men than Gabriel had been willing to die for her sake, and in these last few days it often seemed to Ferdinand as though she had simply forgotten the whole tragic business. Trehenhof was also able to explain this singular circumstance by maintaining that women had more of the elemental in them than men, and from the beginning were created

to bear with composure what cannot be changed.

For the second time Irene danced past Ferdinand and again she smiled. But her smile seemed different this time; it was more friendly and more inviting, and her gaze remained fixed on Ferdinand as she glided off again and disappeared with her partner into the crowd. When the waltz had come to an end Ferdinand walked round the room, wondering what had decoyed him to such a place where the dignified melancholy of his existence, to which the passionate hours spent in Wilhelmine's arms now lent but the impress of a mournful charm, was bound to be disturbed by all the clamorous banalities of a public ball. And he was suddenly seized by a longing, not merely to leave the place, but very soon—possibly to-morrow—to leave Vienna and start on a journey to the south, to Sicily or Egypt. He even reflected whether he should say good-bye to Wilhelmine—when Irene suddenly stood before him. She inclined her head slightly and returned his greeting; he offered her his arm, led her through the throng in the ballroom, up the half-dozen steps to the broad dais, dotted with supper tables, that surrounded the dancing-floor. At that moment the music started again, and as the first chords rang out Irene said softly: "He is dead, and we two are

here." Ferdinand felt a little alarmed, unconsciously hastened his step, and at last remarked: "To-day is the first time I have come into such a large company."

"It is the third time for me," Irene replied in a clear voice. "I have been once to a theatre and once to an evening party."

"Was it amusing?" asked Ferdinand.

"I don't know. Someone played the piano, someone else sang some comic songs, and then we danced."

"Yes, it is always the same," remarked Ferdinand.

They were standing by a door. "I am engaged for the quadrille," said Irene, "but I shall not dance. Let us escape to the gallery."

Ferdinand led Irene up the narrow, chilly, spiral staircase. He noticed a few scattered flecks of powder on Irene's shoulders. She wore her dark hair in a heavy knot low down on her neck. Her arm lay lightly upon his. The door to the gallery stood open, and a waiter, who was sitting in the first box, hastily got up.

"I should like a glass of champagne," said Irene.

"Oh!" thought Ferdinand, "perhaps she is going to be more interesting than I imagined. Or is it affectation?"

He ordered the wine and then moved a chair back

for her so that she could not be seen from below.

"You were a friend of his?" asked Irene, and looked him straight in the eyes.

"A friend? I can hardly say that. In any case in the last few years our relations were very slight." And he thought to himself: "How strangely she looks at me. I wonder if she guesses that . . ." But he went on: "Five or six years ago I went to a few lectures with him at the University. As a matter of fact, we were both studying law in a casual sort of way. Then, three years ago, in the autumn, we went on a bicycling tour from Innsbruck, where we had met quite by chance, over the Brenner. We parted again in Verona: I returned to Vienna and he went on to Rome."

Irene nodded several times, as if she had just been listening to somebody that she knew quite well.

"In Rome," Ferdinand continued, "he in fact wrote his first play, or rather his first that was produced."

"Yes," said Irene.

"He did not have much luck," remarked Ferdinand.

The champagne stood on the table, and Ferdinand poured it out. They clinked glasses, and while they were drinking, they looked earnestly into each other's eyes as if the first glass was a toast to the memory of the departed. Then Irene put her glass down and said

quietly, "He killed himself over the Bischof woman."

"So people say," Ferdinand replied simply, and with a sense of satisfaction that his expression did not betray him.

The opening bar of the quadrille crashed out so furiously that the champagne glasses trembled.

"Do you know the Bischof personally?" asked Irene.

"Yes," replied Ferdinand. Then she does not suspect, he thought. Of course not. If she did, she would not be drinking champagne with me up here. Or perhaps she might all the more . . . ?

"I saw the Bischof the other day as Medea," said Irene. "I only went to the theatre on her account. Since the first performance of Gabriel's play last winter I had never seen her on the stage. Did the affair begin then?"

Ferdinand shrugged his shoulders; he had no idea. "She is a great artist," he observed.

"That is quite possible," Irene replied; "but I don't think that gives her the right to . . ."

"What right?" asked Ferdinand, as he filled the glasses once more.

"The right to drive a man to his death," said Irene, finishing her sentence and staring into vacancy.

"Yes," said Ferdinand thoughtfully, "where the right begins on the one side and the responsibility on the other it is difficult to decide. And if one does not know the more intimate circumstances of the case, how can one . . . In any case, Fräulein Bischof is one of those beings who—how shall I say?—seems to belong to a more primitive world than ours, and is not to be judged by our measure."

Irene had laid her small old-fashioned ivory fan upon the table; she picked it up and drew it across her cheeks and forehead, as if to cool herself. Then she drank a glass of wine at a gulp, and said: "That she wasn't faithful to him—well, that I can understand. But why wasn't she straightforward with him? Why didn't she say to him: 'It is all over: I love another, let us part'? It would have hurt him very much, but it would not have driven him to his death."

"Who knows?" said Ferdinand slowly.

"Of course it would not," repeated Irene sharply. "It was disgust that drove him to that—simply disgust. He must have thought to himself: 'the very same words she used to me, the very same endearments . . .'" A shiver went through her body, her gaze wandered across the balustrade down into the hall, and she was silent.

Ferdinand looked at her and could not understand how any man on earth could kill himself for Wilhelmine's sake when this girl was in love with him. At this moment he doubted more deeply than ever whether Gabriel had ever had any talent. It was true that he had only the vaguest recollection of the piece in which Wilhelmine had played the leading part the year before, and after the failure of which, as a sort of compensation, she had become Gabriel's mistress. Then, with averted eyes, Irene said softly: "Did you see nothing of him, then, these last few years?"

"Very little," answered Ferdinand. "It was not until last autumn that we met again a few times. I ran into him once in the Ring. He was with the Bischof, and we all had supper together in the Volksgarten. It was a very pleasant evening. One could still sit in the open air although it was already the end of October. Then we met a few times after that evening, once or twice actually in Fräulein Bischof's flat. Yes, it might have seemed to some extent, as though we had found each other again after a long interval. But nothing came of it." Ferdinand glanced at Irene and smiled.

"Now I will tell you something," said Irene. "I had intended to call on Fräulein Bischof."

"What!" cried Ferdinand, and looked at Irene's forehead, which was very white and higher than girl's foreheads usually are.

The quadrille was at an end, and the music stopped. A confused hum of voices surged up from below. A few indifferent words rang out more clearly as though they had been strong enough to force their way through the din.

"I had really quite made up my mind," said Irene, as she snapped her ivory fan to and fro, "but it was very childish of me, I know—my courage always failed me at the last moment."

"Why did you want to call on her?" asked Ferdinand.

"Why? Surely that is very simple. I wanted to see her face to face, to hear her voice, I wanted to know how she speaks and moves in daily life, and ask her questions about all manner of ordinary things. Can't you understand that?" she added with sudden vehemence, laughed shortly, drank a mouthful of wine, and went on. "It is interesting to know what these women are really like, these secret creatures, that are to be judged by a different standard, in your opinion, these women for whom good men kill themselves, and who then appear on the stage three days later,

tall and magnificent, as if nothing in the world were changed."

Two men sauntered past, stopped, turned, and stared at Irene.

Ferdinand was annoyed, and decided, if this insolence lasted a second longer, to get up and call the two men to account. And he saw himself already exchanging cards, receiving seconds, driving through the Prater in the grey dawn, wounded in the chest, sinking down on to the damp earth, and last of all Wilhelmine standing with some actor at his graveside. But before the second's grace had elapsed they had ceased to stare and walked on. And Ferdinand again heard Irene's voice.

"I should have the courage now," she said, with a strange half-despairing smile.

"Courage for what?" asked Ferdinand.

"Courage to go and see Fräulein Bischof."

"Go and see Fräulein Bischof . . . now?"

"Yes, now, at once. What do you think of it?" and she swayed her shoulders in time with the music. "Or shall we dance a waltz?"

"After all, it isn't far off," said Ferdinand.

"Isn't it marvellous?" said Irene, with a merry look. "What has changed since we have been sit-

ting in this box and drinking champagne? Nothing. Not the least thing. And suddenly one realises that death is not so dreadful as one had usually imagined. Look: I feel quite prepared to throw myself down from here—or from the top of a tower. I should not mind in the least—really! And how well we have got to know each other! But you must thank Gabriel for that."

"I never imagined . . ." began Ferdinand, with a polite smile, and he noticed that his heart was throbbing slightly.

The merry look had gone from Irene's eyes: they were large, dark, and serious. "And do you know what was in my mind?" she said, without listening to him. "I wanted to introduce myself as a budding actress or simply as an enthusiastic admirer. 'For a long time I've been longing to . . . I've been so terribly anxious to . . .' that's how I should have begun. These women are all very vain, aren't they?"

"That is part of their profession," replied Ferdinand.

"Ah, I should have flattered her so that she would have been simply enchanted, and would certainly have asked me to come again. . . . And I would have come many times, we should have become very in-

timate—friends, in fact; until one day—yes—I should have screamed into her face some time or other: 'Do you know what you did? Do you know what you are? A murderess. That's what you are, Fräulein Bischof.'"

Ferdinand looked at her with astonishment, and again wondered what sort of a fool this Gabriel must have been.

A buzz and a clatter rose up from the room, and it all seemed to come from further away than before. Two couples walked by, sat down not far away at a table by the wall, talking and laughing loudly. Then the orchestra crashed out into another dance.

"Supposing I went to see her now?" asked Irene.

"Now?"

"Do you think she would receive me?"

"It would be an odd time to go," said Ferdinand, with a smile.

"Oh, well, it can't be nearly midnight yet, and she was acting to-day."

"How do you know?"

"There's nothing surprising about that, it was in the paper, wasn't it? She will just have come home. It would be the simplest thing in the world. We will send in our names, and tell any story you like, or just

simply the truth. Yes: I was coming straight back from a ball—my longing to get to know her got the better of me—I wanted just to kiss her hand once . . . and so on. The carriage will wait for us below, and we shall be back before the interval. No one will have noticed."

"If you really mean to go, Fräulein," said Ferdinand, "then you must let me go with you."

Irene looked at him. There was a tense decided look on her face. "Then you don't think that I really . . ."

"But have you the courage to jump off a tower, Fräulein?"

Irene stared into his eyes and suddenly got up.

"Come along, then," she said, and a dark shadow passed over her forehead.

Ferdinand called the waiter, paid, gave Irene his arm, and led her down the two flights of stairs into the ante-room. Then he helped her into a light grey cloak: she turned up the fur collar and tied a lace scarf round her head. Without a word to each other, they went out through the door into the gateway. A carriage came up and they sped noiselessly to their destination over the snow-covered street.

From time to time Ferdinand threw a sidelong

glance at Irene. She sat motionless, and from her veiled face her eyes stared out into the darkness. When, after a few minutes, the carriage stopped in front of the house in the Park-Ring Irene waited until Ferdinand had rung the bell and the door had opened. Ferdinand felt as though he had awakened from a dream, as the familiar parlour-maid stood before him and looked with astonishment at him and his companion.

"Please ask the Fräulein," said Ferdinand, "whether she will be so good as to receive us."

The girl smiled, said nothing, and showed the pair into the drawing-room. Under the light from the candelabra, Ferdinand saw the semblances of himself and Irene hovering like two strange beings in the Venetian mirror that hung out from the wall over the black, gleaming grand piano. A sudden thought came into his head. How if Irene had got him to introduce her so that she might murder Wilhelmine? The idea vanished as soon as it had come and yet the girl who stood at his side, and slowly unwound the scarf from her head, seemed to him entirely changed—almost like some strange creature whose voice he had never heard before.

A door opened, and Wilhelmine entered wearing

a soft velvet indoor dress cut away from the neck. She gave a hand to Ferdinand, and looked at him and his companion with an air of welcome rather than of surprise. Ferdinand tried to give some facetious explanation of this nocturnal visit. He told Wilhelmine that during the dance his companion had talked of nothing but her admiration for Fräulein Bischof, and how he, in a sort of carnival mood, had offered at this unearthly hour to go with her to her idol's house—at the risk of both being bundled downstairs again.

"What nonsense," replied Wilhelmine; "on the contrary I am delighted," and she gave a hand to Irene. "I must only ask you to be kind enough to keep me company at supper—I have just come back from the theatre."

They all went into the next room where under a greenish crystal shade with little frosted lights a table stood, half of which was laid for supper. While Ferdinand took off his fur coat and threw it on to the divan, Wilhelmine herself took Irene's cloak from her shoulders and hung it over the back of a chair. Then she took some glasses from a sideboard, filled them with white wine, and set them before Ferdinand and Irene, after which she herself sat down, calmly

helped herself to some cold meat, cut it up, said "Excuse me," and began to eat. From time to time she threw a friendly, faintly smiling glance at Irene and Ferdinand.

"She naturally takes it as a matter of course," thought Ferdinand, a little disappointed; "and if I had brought the Empress of China and announced my appointment as Mandarin, she would not have thought it strange. It is really rather a pity. 'For women who are never surprised never entirely belong to any man.'" It was a remark of Trehenhof's which suddenly came into his mind.

"Did you have a good time at the ball?" asked Wilhelmine. Ferdinand answered that the room was too full, the people mostly detestable, and the music poor; and so he went on. Wilhelmine glanced at him good-humouredly, and turning to Irene asked whether her companion were a good dancer. Irene nodded and smiled. Her "Yes" was almost inaudible.

"Did you play Feodora to-day, Fräulein?" asked Ferdinand, so as not to let the conversation drop. "Was there a large audience?"

"Packed," Wilhelmine replied.

Irene then said: "I am sorry to say I have never

seen you as Feodora, Fräulein Bischof. But I saw you as Medea not so long ago. It was splendid."

"Thank you very much," answered Wilhelmine.

After a few more words of admiration, Irene asked Wilhelmine which were her favourite parts and seemed to listen to her answers with interest. Then they came upon the eternal question—whether the greater actor is the one who loses himself in the part he is presenting or the one who stands above it. Ferdinand mentioned that a young comedian he knew had told him that he had played a certain highly amusing part more effectively than ever on the very day of his father's funeral.

"Nice sort of friends you must have," Wilhelmine observed, putting a section of orange into her mouth.

"What on earth is all this?" thought Ferdinand. "Has Fräulein Irene forgotten that she wanted to call Wilhelmine a murderess to her face? . . . And is Wilhelmine still aware that I am her lover, though I have called upon her in the middle of the night with a strange woman? . . ."

"You are so keenly interested in the theatre, Fräulein," remarked Wilhelmine, "I wonder if you have ever thought of taking up acting as a career."

Irene shook her head. "Alas, I have no talent!"

"Well, you may be thankful," said Wilhelmine, "stage life is a sink."

And as she began to talk of all the humiliations that an actress has to endure, Ferdinand noticed that Irene was staring, as though bewitched, at a half-open door, through the crack of which a bluish glow was visible. And he noticed how Irene's face, which had hitherto been motionless, began to stir slightly under its pallor, and how the silent lips began to quiver strangely. And he thought he could see in her wide-open eyes an evil longing to force her way into that bluish room and bury her face in the pillow on which Gabriel's head had once rested. It then occurred to him that although Irene's absence might until now have been unnoticed, if she stayed away any longer it might be awkward for her and for himself; and he pushed back his chair.

Irene turned towards him as though awakening from a dream. Wilhelmine's last words still echoed in their ears, though they had not heard them.

"It is quite time for us to go," said Irene, and got up.

"I am very sorry that you can't stay longer," answered Wilhelmine.

Irene gazed at her with a calm and searching look.

"Well, my child?" asked Wilhelmine.

"It is strange, Fräulein," said Irene, "how you remind me of a picture we have at home of a Croat or Slovak peasant woman praying before a holy image at the side of a snowy country road."

Wilhelmine nodded thoughtfully, as if she clearly remembered the winter day on which she had knelt in the snow in Croatia before that holy image. Then she insisted on putting Irene's cloak round her shoulders and accompanied her guests into the hall. "Well, go back and have some more jolly dances," she said; "that is, if you really are going back to the ball."

Irene became deathly pale—but smiled.

"You need to be careful of him," added Wilhelmine, and threw a glance at Ferdinand—the first that held anything like a recollection of the night that had gone before.

Ferdinand did not answer: he only felt how Irene covered Wilhelmine and himself with one and the same dark look.

The maid appeared, Wilhelmine once more held out her hands to her guests, said she hoped the girl would come and see her again soon, and smiled at

Ferdinand as though she had won a game against him—a game that they had both agreed to play.

Accompanied by the maid carrying a taper, Ferdinand and Irene went down the stairs in silence. The outer door was soon shut behind them. The driver stood by the carriage, Irene got in, and Ferdinand sat down beside her. The horses trotted through the noiseless snow. Suddenly a ray of light from a street lamp fell on Irene's face. Ferdinand saw that she was staring at him with parted lips.

"So it was you," she said softly, and her voice seemed to quiver with amazement, horror, and hate. And again they were in darkness.

"If she had a dagger with her," thought Ferdinand, "I wonder would she stab with it? . . . And yet, however you look at the thing, I really shouldn't deserve it. Surely I was a social force, not a . . ." And he fell to meditating whether he should not try to explain the affair to her. Not in the least to justify himself, but because this intelligent creature well deserved to be initiated into the deeper significances of the whole story.

Suddenly he felt arms about him, and Irene's lips on his—savage, hot, and sweet. It was a kiss such as he believed he had never felt before, so fragrant

and mysterious, and he wished it might not end. Mouth clung to mouth till the carriage stopped.

Ferdinand got out and gave his hand to Irene.

"You are not to follow me," she said harshly, and disappeared into the hall. Ferdinand stayed outside. It did not for a moment occur to him to disobey her command. He realised quite clearly, and with sudden sorrow, that it was over, and that this kiss could have no sequel.

Three days later he related his adventure to Anastasius Trehenhof, to whom one could tell everything, for discretion in his company would have been as childish as in the presence of the good God.

"It is a pity," said Anastasius, after brief reflection, "that she did not become your mistress. Your child would have interested me. We have enough children of Love, far too many children of Indifference, but of children of Hatred far too few. And yet it is not impossible that from them may come our salvation."

"So you think . . ." began Ferdinand.

"Come now, don't you flatter yourself," answered Anastasius sharply.

Ferdinand hung his head and was silent.

Besides, he had his sleeping-car ticket to Trieste in his pocket, and from there he went on to Alexandria, Cairo, Assouan. . . . Three days ago he too had realised that people may die of hopeless love—other people, of course—other people.

THE MURDERER

THE MURDERER

A CERTAIN YOUNG MAN, A BARRISTER WHO DID NOT practise, without parents, comfortably off, and a popular and pleasant member of society, had for more than a year lived with a girl of humble origin, who, like him, had no relations, and did not need to consider public opinion. At the very beginning of the acquaintance, less from kindness or passion than from the desire to enjoy his happiness as far as possible undisturbed, Alfred had made his mistress give up her position as correspondence-clerk in an important Viennese shop. For a long time, flattered by her grateful tenderness, he had felt happier in the quiet enjoyment of their common freedom than in any previous liaison, but at last he grew gradually aware of that well-known feeling of restless anticipation that with him had always meant the end of such a relationship—an end that, in this case, however, could not at present be foreseen. He already imagined himself as the companion in misfortune

of an old friend of his who had been entangled, years before, in a connection of the kind, and now was forced to live a retired and restricted life as a harassed father of a family: and many hours that, without such forebodings, in the company of a sweet, gentle creature like Elise, would have been hours of pure delight, he now began to find wearisome and painful. He was the sort of man who was quite clever enough, and, he flattered himself, considerate enough, not to let Elise notice these feelings of his, but still they had the effect of making him once more frequent that comfortable middle-class society which he had almost deserted in the course of the last year. And when a very popular young lady, whom he met at a dance, the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer, treated him with marked friendliness, and he suddenly saw before him the promising possibility of an engagement suited to his position and his means, he began to look on the other connection, which he had begun as a cheerful inconsequent adventure, as a burdensome fetter which a young man with his advantages should be able to shake off without hesitation. But the smiling serenity with which Elise always welcomed him, her never-varying devotion during the hours, now fewer and fewer, that they spent

together, the unclouded confidence with which she let him go from her arms into a world unknown—all this not merely silenced the words of parting on his lips every time he thought he had firmly decided to speak, but filled him with a sort of tormented sympathy, whose hardly realised expression could but seem, to an utterly trusting creature like Elise, a new and sincerer mark of his affection for her. And so it came about that Elise never believed herself more passionately adored by him than when he was fresh from some meeting with Adèle, when, trembling still at the recollection of her sweet, questioning glance, her thrilling touch, and, later, by the fragrance of their first secret lovers' kiss, he came back to a home consecrated to him alone and to his faithless love; and every morning Alfred left his mistress, not with the words of parting that he had composed outside the door, but with fresh protestations of eternal fidelity. And so the days went on, and so did Alfred's two romances. At last the problem for decision really was which evening he had better choose for the inevitable explanation with Elise—the one before or the one after his betrothal with Adèle: and on the first of these two evenings (had he not still a respite?) Alfred came in to his mistress, thanks to

the habit of his double life, with an air of almost unruffled composure.

He found her paler than he had ever seen her before, leaning back in the corner of the divan: nor did she get up as usual when he came in, to offer her forehead and mouth for a kiss of welcome. She looked at him with a tired forced smile, so that, not without a feeling of relief, a suspicion came into Alfred's mind that the news of his forthcoming betrothal had, in spite of all attempts at secrecy, in the mysterious way of rumours, found its way to her. But in answer to his hurried questions Elise merely said that, though she had not mentioned it before, she suffered from time to time with heart-attacks, from which she usually recovered quickly, but this time the after-effects seemed likely to last longer than ever before. Alfred, in the consciousness of his guilty purpose, was very much upset by this disclosure; he was all kindness and sympathy, and before midnight, without an idea how the thing had got so far, he and Elise had planned a trip together, which was to be a lasting cure for these unpleasant seizures.

Never had she been so tender to him, and never had he felt such tenderness for her as when he said

good-bye that night; indeed, on his way home he seriously considered writing a letter of farewell to Adèle, in which he proposed to excuse his escape from betrothal and the bonds of marriage on the grounds that his vacillating character made him quite unfitted for a life of permanent and peaceful happiness. The artful turns of phrase haunted him even in his sleep but with the light of morning, as it shone through the slits of the jalousies and flickered on his coverlet, he felt that his anxiety had been both foolish and superfluous. Indeed, he scarcely thought it strange that his suffering lady of the night before seemed like a dream, vanished and forgotten, while Adèle stood before his mind, glowing with the fragrance of his infinite desire.

At midday he made his proposal to Adèle's father, who was friendly but not entirely favourable. With a good-humoured and playful reference to the many temptations of a young man like himself, the father, on the contrary, insisted that Alfred should first travel for a year so that he might test the strength and endurance of his feelings at a distance, and he actually forbade the two young people to correspond, so that he might be certain there had been no opportunity for self-deception in this way. If Alfred were of the

same mind when he came home, and if he then found that Adèle felt the same as she was sure she did today, then, so far as he was concerned, there would be not the slightest objection to the young couple's immediate marriage. Alfred made a show of reluctance in agreeing to these terms, but, in fact, he took them with an inward sigh of relief as giving him a future respite before the dreadful day; after a moment's thought he explained that in these circumstances he would like to leave at once, and so bring the period of separation all the sooner to an end. Adèle seemed at first hurt by this submissive attitude, but at the end of the short private talk allowed by her father she was full of admiration for her lover's good sense, and sent him, protesting his fidelity and with actual tears in his eyes, into the dangers of a distant separation.

Scarcely had he got into the street when Alfred began to think over in his mind all the possibilities that might, in the course of the year he had before him, lead to a solution of his relations with Elise. And his impulse to dispose of the most serious difficulties of life, without really facing them, was so overmastering that it not merely overcame his vanity, but even drew to the surface of his mind certain

darker imaginings which in the ordinary way would have been quite abhorrent to his easy-going nature. Under the pressure of unusually close companionship, such as was inevitable on a journey, Elise's feelings might well, he thought, grow cooler, and she might gradually come to dislike him; and his mistress's heart trouble might also set him free in a manner that would, of course, be more unwelcome. However, he soon thrust both hopes and fears so violently from him that, finally, his only feeling was one of childish, delighted expectation of an agreeable trip abroad in the company of a pleasant and devoted creature; and on the evening of that very day he was talking away in the highest spirits to his guileless companion about the delightful prospects of the journey they were to make.

As the spring was drawing near Alfred and Elise first visited the mild shores of Lake Geneva. Later on they went up to various cooler mountain resorts; they spent the late summer by the seaside in England; in the autumn they visited the Dutch and German cities, and last of all, when the dark days began to come upon them, they fled to the genial southern sun. Until then, Elise, who had never before left the neighbourhood of Vienna, had moved

through that year of wonders like a beautiful dreamer led by a beloved guide. Even Alfred, though he never forgot the future and the crisis he had but postponed, seemed under the same spell as Elise, and gave himself up, unreflecting, to the delights of the moment. And though, at the beginning of their journey, he had carefully tried to keep away from people he knew, and had, so far as possible, avoided showing himself with Elise on populous promenades, or in the dining-rooms of great hotels, later on he challenged fate almost of set purpose, and had he received a telegram from his betrothed accusing him of disloyalty, he would have been perfectly willing to give up a future that still attracted him if he might but rid himself of all doubt, disquiet, and responsibility. But no telegram, nor any news at all, found its way to him from home, for, contrary to Alfred's conceited expectations, Adèle held as strictly as he to the undertaking on which her father had insisted.

However, the hour arrived in which—at least for Alfred—this wonder-year came to a sudden end, and seemed to stand for an instant suspended in time, bereft of its magic, more desolate than any he had known. This happened one day in late autumn in the

Botanic Garden in Palermo, when Elise, who until then had been so fresh and lively and blooming, suddenly clutched with both hands at her heart, looked nervously at her lover, and then smiled as if she knew it was a duty not to cause him any inconvenience. But this, instead of touching him, filled him with bitterness, which he did in fact at first try to disguise under an air of concern. He reproached her, though he did not believe what he said, with having constantly concealed such attacks from him; told her he was very hurt that she obviously regarded him as heartless; asked her to promise she would go with him to a doctor at once, and was very glad when she refused, as she said she had no confidence in the local quacks. But when, as though in an access of gratitude and love, there in the open air, on that bench with people passing to and fro, she suddenly seized his hand and put it to her lips, he felt something like a wave of hatred surge through his veins, that actually surprised himself; but he soon found an excuse for it in the many hours of boredom and emptiness which (did he not know it?) had been all too frequent on that journey. So a burning desire for Adèle suddenly flamed up within him, and in defiance of his promise,

he sent a telegram to her that very day in which he begged her to send him a word to Genoa, and which he signed "Yours forever."

A few days later he found her reply in Genoa, which read: "Yours for just as long." And, carrying this crumpled sheet against his heart—for in spite of its sceptical mocking tone, it was the epitome of all his hopes—he set out with Elise on his journey to Ceylon, which they had left until the end as they thought it would probably be the most delightful part of their trip. It would have taken a far subtler woman than Elise to guess that, on this journey, it was only Alfred's bold imagination that made her feel such rapture as she had never known in his love, and to realise that it was not she who lay in his arms in those dark and silent nights at sea, but a lady far away, whom his desire was able to conjure into a living presence. But after they had reached that burning island, in the dull monotony of the last part of their stay there, when he found that the image he had all too impetuously evoked now refused to serve him, he began to leave Elise alone, and was malicious enough to use a slight return of the heart trouble, which attacked her soon after she got ashore, as an excuse for his aloofness. She took this, like

everything he did, as a sign of the love that had now become all the meaning and happiness of her existence. And when, under the glare of that blue and golden sky, she clung to his side as they drove through the rustling shade of the forests, she did not know that her companion was merely longing for that solitary hour when, undisturbed by Elise, his flying pen would scribble imploring passionate words to another of whose existence Elise did not yet know, and never was to know. In such hours of solitude he was filled with so vast a longing for the absent one that he could forget the features, nay, the very voice, of the woman at his side, this woman that was his, with whom he had wandered over the world for nearly a whole year. And when, the night before they were to start the voyage home, on leaving the writing-room, he found Elise stretched out on her bed, unconscious from another serious attack, he recognised with a feeling of mild, almost agreeable, horror, that what he had thought was a sensation of slight anxiety was, in fact, the inextinguishable, darkly glimmering hope of his very soul. However, it was in very real and painful agitation that he at once sent for the doctor, who soon appeared and relieved the patient with an injection of morphia. But he gave the

supposed husband, who explained that he had serious reasons for not postponing a voyage on which much depended, a note recommending Elise to the special care of the ship's doctor.

In the very first few days the sea-air seemed to have a healing influence on Elise. Her pallor disappeared, her whole being unfolded, her manner was less constrained than Alfred had ever known it. And, while she had hitherto been indifferent, almost hostile, to any, even the most innocent, overtures from strangers, on this occasion she showed no signs of avoiding the casual conversation inevitable on board ship, and accepted with pleasure the respectful homage of a few male fellow passengers. A certain German baron, in particular, who was trying to cure long-standing lung trouble by a sea voyage, spent as much time as he could in Elise's company without becoming a nuisance, and Alfred would have liked to persuade himself that Elise's encouraging demeanour to this, the most agreeable of her admirers, was the welcome sign of a new and growing inclination. But when, with an appearance of anger, he tried to call Elise to account for her rather marked friendliness, she smilingly explained to him that all this forthcoming manner of hers was simply intended to arouse his

jealousy, and she was delighted with the success of her little stratagem. This time Alfred could no longer conceal his impatience and disappointment. He replied to her confession, by which she had thought to soothe and please him, with a harshness she could not understand. She stood before him for a moment or two in dumb perplexity, and then suddenly fell unconscious on the deck, where they had been talking, and had to be carried below to her cabin. The ship's doctor, who knew what the trouble was from his colleague's letter, did not think a careful examination necessary, and temporarily relieved that tormented heart by the same means as before. But he was not able to prevent the occurrence of future attacks, without any apparent cause, on the next day and the day after, and although morphia never failed in its effect, he did not conceal his fear that the illness might have a fatal end, and warned Alfred, in appropriate but quite definite terms, to use every possible consideration towards his beautiful wife.

Alfred, in the throes of his dumb resentment against Elise, would have been very ready to take this advice in regard to one particular especially, as to which the doctor had been very emphatic, if Elise had not been overcome by her desire, one dark night of lone-

liness, and had succeeded in tempting him, in spite of his resistance, back into her arms, as though to make her peace by her endearments. And yet as she lay there in his embrace, exhausted and with half-closed eyes, and he watched the bluish glitter of the waves shimmering through the little port-hole window on to her moist forehead, he felt his lips curl into a smile; it came from the deepest recesses of his soul, and he knew it for a smile of contempt, nay—even of triumph. And while he became shudderingly conscious of this dark hope of his, he had to admit to himself that its fulfillment meant salvation to him and deliverance from all his troubles, especially as Elise, if she knew the end to be inevitable and were given a choice, would certainly wish for no other than to pass away beneath his kisses. And as she now, though fully conscious of the risk, seemed prepared, in ever more passionate self-abandonment, to die for love and in the act of loving, he too felt himself strong enough to accept a sacrifice by which, dreadful as it might seem, the complications of destiny might so work out as to make three human beings happy in the end.

But while, night after night, he watched with expectant dread the dull glitter in her eyes, her ecstatic

gasps for breath, and then a minute later her awakening gaze lit up once more, the warm breath rose to her lips eager to meet his, he felt as though he had been cheated; his murderous malignity spent itself in sending a wave of fresh and lovely life pulsing through Elise's veins. And she was so sure of his love that in the daytime, when he left her alone or to the company of others, to go and cool his fevered forehead in the sea-breeze on the upper deck, she stayed behind without misgiving, and when he came back to her with his wild and wandering smile, she answered it with shining eyes, as though it had been a greeting of affection.

At Naples, where the ship was to call and stay a day, and then go on to Hamburg without any further stop, Alfred hoped to find a letter from Adèle—he had written from Ceylon imploring her to send one there. The stormy weather made it unnecessary for him to find a pretext for leaving Elise and going ashore with some casual acquaintances on one of the boats that lay near by. He drove to the post office, went up to the counter, gave in his name, but had to go away with empty hands. When he tried to console himself with the fact that Adèle's letter had not been sent in time, or had been lost, the feeling of

desolation that came over him made him realise that a life without Adèle was for him unthinkable. He was now at the end of his powers of deception, and he first thought of telling Elise the brutal truth the moment he got back to the ship. But then he reflected that the consequences of such a confession could not be foreseen—Elise might drop dead on the spot, or it might drive her to madness or suicide, and the circumstances of such a mishap could not be concealed, and this might damage his relations with Adèle. He ran the same risk if he postponed his confession to the last moment—until they landed in Hamburg, or even until their arrival in Vienna. Full of these despairing thoughts and even now hardly conscious of their implication, Alfred wandered up and down the seashore in the burning noontide sunshine, when he suddenly felt giddy and almost on the point of fainting. He sank nervously on to a bench and waited until the spasm passed and the cloud faded from before his eyes. Then he drew a deep breath as though awakening from sleep. He became suddenly aware that in that instant when his perceptions had threatened to give way a decision had come to fullness in his mind, terrible and clear, that had long been maturing in his deeper consciousness. This awful,

burning purpose, whose fulfillment he had tried for many days to bring forth from its cowardly concealment, he must now accomplish, without more delay, by his own will and by his own hands. And as though it had been the fruit of long reflection, a finished plan came forth into his mind.

He got up, and first went to an hotel where he ate his lunch with an excellent appetite. Then he called on three doctors one after the other, pretended to be subject to attacks of agonising pain, and that his stock of morphia to which he had been accustomed for years had run out. He took the prescriptions for which he asked, had them made up by different chemists and when he went on board again at sunset, he was in possession of a dose that he was sure was more than sufficient for his purpose. At dinner on the ship he gave an enthusiastic description of how he had spent the day in an excursion to Pompeii, and with a positive lust for lying, as though to damn himself more deeply, he dwelt on the description of a quarter of an hour that he had spent in the garden of Appius Claudius in contemplation of a statuette which, of course, in reality he had never seen, but happened to have seen mentioned in a guide-book. Elise sat at his side, with the baron opposite her;

their eyes met and Alfred could not rid himself of the idea that these were two ghosts glaring at each other from empty eye-sockets.

Later, as they had so often done before, he walked up and down with Elise on the upper deck in the moonlight, while far away the lights glittered on the coast. He felt himself weaken for a moment, but he roused his determination once again by imagining that it was Adèle's arm that pressed against his own; and by the glow of passion that shot through his veins he realised that the most terrible crime was not too high a price to pay for the happiness that awaited him. At the same time he felt a sort of secret envy of the young creature at his side who was so soon to find release, without pain and without foreknowledge, from the perplexities of living.

When they were in their cabin and he took Elise in his arms for the last time he saw her with an utter and almost unbearably intensified clarity of vision, and yet there was a despairing passion in his embrace; but he felt as though he were accomplishing a destiny in which his will no longer took a part. It needed but one movement of his fingers to upset the glass where it stood, glimmering with bluish iridescence on the little table, and the poison drops

could have trickled in harmless moisture on to the indifferent floor. But Alfred lay motionless and waited. He waited until at last, as his heart stood still, Elise, with a movement that he knew so well, reached out her hand with half-closed eyes, as she always did, for a glass to quench her thirst before she slept. He did not stir; he watched her with staring eyes as she raised herself slightly, put the glass to her lips, and swallowed the contents at a gulp. Then she lay down again with a gentle sigh, and laying her head on his breast, as her custom was, prepared to sleep. Alfred heard a long dull hammering in his temples; he heard Elise's quiet breathing; he heard the waves beating as if in lamentation against the bows of the ship, as it glided forward; and time seemed to stand still.

Suddenly he felt a violent shudder pass through Elise's body. Her two hands clutched at his neck, her fingers seemed to be trying to pierce his skin, and then, with a long groan, she opened her eyes. Alfred freed himself from her embrace, sprang out of bed, watched her try to raise herself, fling her arms into the air, stare into the half-light with wild fluttering eyes, and then suddenly collapse full length and lie completely motionless except for short, sharp

gasps for breath. Alfred at once realised that she was quite unconscious, and coldly wondered how long it would be before the end. It also occurred to him that at this moment she might still be saved, and with an obscure feeling that he would in this way tempt fate once again—either he would destroy the fruits of what he had accomplished or by a bold stroke find atonement; so he ran to fetch the doctor. If the latter realised what had happened, then the game would be definitely lost; otherwise he was freed forever from guilt and from remorse.

When Alfred came into the cabin, Elise lay back, pale, with glazed and half-closed eyes, her fingers clenched in the coverlet, and beads of sweat glittering on her forehead and her cheeks. The doctor bent down, laid his ear to her breast, listened for a time, nodded gravely, drew back Elise's eyelids, held his own hand to her lips, and listened again; then he turned to Alfred and told him that the death struggle was over. With a wild look that was not dissembled, Alfred hid his head in his hands, sank down by the bedside, and remained for awhile with his forehead pressed against Elise's knee. Then he turned and stared helplessly at the doctor, who held out his hand to him in sympathy. Alfred did not take it, shook his

head, and, his mind completely clear and composed, he added as though in self-reproach now that it was too late: "If only we had followed your advice." Then he buried his face gloomily in his hands. "That is what I thought," he heard the doctor say in a tone of gentle reproof, and in an overmastering sensation of triumph he knew his eyes were blazing behind their twitching lids.

The next day, in accordance with the instructions, Elise's body was consigned to the sea, and Alfred, as the widower, felt himself surrounded by universal though silent sympathy. No one liked to disturb him when he walked up and down the deck for hours and stared into a distance that for him—though no one knew it—was hidden by a haze of joy to come. Only the baron occasionally joined Alfred for a few minutes as he paced to and fro, and even so he carefully refrained from uttering a word about the tragedy. Alfred knew very well that the only reason that led the baron to accompany him was his desire to feel the atmosphere of the dear dead woman about him once again. For Alfred these few minutes were the only times in which the past seemed at all to move him. Otherwise he had completely raised himself above his act and what it might mean to other men.

In the living present stood before him the image of the woman he yearned for, whom his guilt had won—and when he looked down into the water from the bow of the ship, it seemed as though he saw it rippling peacefully over buried worlds to which, in those slumberous depths, it mattered little whether they had foundered yesterday or a thousand years ago.

Only when the German coast came into sight did his pulse begin to beat faster. His purpose was to stay in Hamburg no longer than was necessary to pick up the letter that must be waiting for him, and then to take the next train home. The tedious business of disembarkation set him quivering with impatience; and he sighed with relief when his luggage was at last put on the carriage and he drove through the streets of the city to the post office under a sky dotted with the small pink clouds of a late spring afternoon. He gave his card to the clerk, watched him with greedy eyes as he turned over the letters, held out his hand in readiness, and received the answer that there was nothing for him—no letter, no card, no telegram. He put on an incredulous smile, and asked the official in an almost humble tone, of which he was instantly ashamed, to look again. Then

Alfred tried to make out the addresses over the edges of the envelopes, and several times he thought he recognised his name in Adèle's handwriting, more than once he hopefully held out his hand—only to be told again that he was mistaken. At last the official put the packet back into the pigeon-hole, shook his head, and turned away. Alfred wished him good-day with exaggerated courtesy, and the next minute found himself standing bewildered at the door. Only one thing was clear, and that was that he must stay where he was for the present—he could not possibly go on to Vienna without news of some kind from Adèle.

He drove to an hotel, took a room, and scribbled the following words on one of the forms that lay ready on the table:—

> "No word from you. Can't understand it. Quite distracted. Back day after to-morrow. When can I see you? Reply at once."

He added his address, and had it sent off reply paid.

When he came down into the entrance-hall, which was already lighted up for the evening, he was aware of someone looking at him—someone who, without

getting up, greeted him gravely from where he was sitting with a newspaper on his knee; it was the baron, to whom he had only had time to say a hurried good-bye before he left the boat. Alfred said he was delighted at this unexpected meeting, and really believed he was, and he told the baron that he intended to stay until the next day. The baron, who, in spite of his pallor and persistent cough, said he felt very well, proposed during dinner that they should visit a music-hall together, and when Alfred hesitated he added softly and with lowered eyelids that grief had never yet brought anyone to life again. Alfred laughed, and then was startled by his laughter, thought the baron had noticed his embarrassment, and at once decided that the wisest thing he could do would be to agree. Soon after he found himself sitting with the baron in a box, drinking champagne, and watching, through the smoke and haze, the tricks and antics of acrobats and clowns, accompanied by the vulgar din of a blaring orchestra, listening to half-naked women singing risqué songs, and with a kind of demented defiance pointing out to his silent companion the graceful legs and bosoms displayed upon the stage. Then he flirted with a flower-seller, threw a yellow rose at the feet of a dancer who shook her

black hair at him invitingly, and laughed aloud when he saw the baron's thin lips curl as if in contempt and disgust. Later on it seemed as though hundreds of people from the hall below were looking up at him with malignant curiosity, and as if all the murmurs and whisperings were meant for him alone. He felt a shiver of fear go down his back, and then it occurred to him that he swallowed several glasses of champagne rather too quickly and he recovered his composure. He was delighted to notice that while he had been leaning over the edge of the box two painted ladies had drawn the baron into a conversation; he breathed deeply as though he had escaped a danger, got up, and nodded to his companion as though to encourage him and wish him luck in his adventure; soon he was walking alone, along streets that he had never seen and never was to see again, whistling some tune or other, and with the feeling that he was wandering through a dream city in the cool night air, back to his hotel.

When he awoke next morning after a deep and heavy sleep, he had at first to remember that he was not on the moving ship, and that the white glimmer yonder was not Elise's morning wrap but a curtain over the window. By a tremendous effort of will,

he thrust aside the tide of memory that threatened him and rang the bell. A telegram was brought to him with his breakfast. He left it on the tray so long as the waiter was in the room; and he had the feeling that such self-control deserved some reward. The door had scarcely shut when he opened the telegram with trembling fingers. At first the letters swam before his eyes, then suddenly they stood before him, stiff and huge:—

"To-morrow morning 11 o'clock. Adèle."

He ran about the room, laughing to himself, and refused to be dashed by the curt, cold tone of the summons. That was her way. And even if he did not find everything at home just as he had been hoping —even if there were some unpleasant disclosures waiting for him—what did that matter? He would again stand before her, in the light of her eyes, in the fragrance of her breath; and his dreadful deed would not have been in vain.

He would not stay in the hotel: he spent the short time before the departure of his train in wandering about the city, with wide-open eyes that saw nothing —neither men nor things. At noon he left Hamburg,

and stared hour after hour through the windows at the flying landscape: all the thoughts, and hopes, and fears that rose in his mind, he strained his now docile will to force into subjection: and if, so as not to look strange to his fellow passengers, he took up a book or a newspaper, he did not read it, he counted up from one to a hundred—five hundred—a thousand. When night fell, his devouring desire broke down all his efforts to keep calm. He called himself a fool for having misinterpreted the absence of news, and the tone of his last telegram, and realised that his only reproach against Adèle was that she had held to the agreement more honourably than he. But even if it had somehow come to her ears that he had been travelling with a woman, he felt himself strong enough in his love to win his injured lady back to him in spite of all her jealousy and fury. And so completely had he become the master of his waking dreams that in that interminable journey through the night he could hear her voice, see the outlines of her form and features, and even feel her kiss more burning sweet than any that her lips had ever given him.

At last he was at home. His house welcomed him with its friendly comfort. The carefully prepared breakfast looked excellently appetising, and for the

first time for many days, so it seemed to him, he thought with perfect calm of one who, freed forever from all earthly care, now slumbered in the silent sea. At one moment he felt as though that succession of hours from the time he landed in Naples until Elise's death might be a figment of his shattered nerves, and that the dreadful ending had been, as the doctors had foreseen, or rather predicted, the result of the normal development of her illness. Yes, the man who, in that sunny foreign city, had hurried so malignantly from doctor to doctor, and from chemist to chemist, and with such dreadful forethought had prepared the deadly poison, the man who had held his beloved in his arms for a last hour of sacrilegious pleasure before he sent her into the beyond, seemed to him a being quite other than himself who sat here drinking tea in this familiar room, and amid these unchanged, homely, comfortable surroundings: he seemed a being greater than himself, to whom he must look up in shuddering admiration. Yet later on, when he was getting out of his bath, and he saw his slim naked body in the mirror and became suddenly conscious that it was he who had done this unbelievable thing, he noticed a hard glitter come into his eyes, and he felt worthier than ever to clasp his expectant lady

to his heart, and (with a curl of contempt upon his lips) more certain than ever of her love.

At the appointed hour he entered the yellow drawing-room, which he had left a year ago almost to the very day, and in the next moment Adèle stood before him, as unconcerned as though she had said good-bye to him the day before: she gave him her hand, and he kissed it and held it long. "Why don't I take her in my arms?" he thought. Then he heard her speak in that husky voice of hers, which had come to him in his dreams that very night; and he was conscious that he himself had not said a word except to whisper her name when she came in. He must not mind, she began, that she had not answered his beautiful letters; but there were certain matters that could be better dealt with face to face than in writing. Her silence must in any case have prepared him for the fact that many things had changed, and the cool tone of her telegram was, as she wished to acknowledge at once, quite intentional. For about six months she had, in fact, been engaged to another. And she mentioned a name that Alfred knew. It was the name of one of his many good friends of old days, of whom he had thought as little in that past year as of most men whom he had met in his previous

life. He listened calmly to Adèle, stared spellbound at her smooth forehead, then through her into nothingness, and there was a murmur in his ears as of distant waves surging over sunken worlds. Suddenly he saw something like a gleam of fear in Adèle's eyes; and he realized that he was standing before her, deadly pale, and with a frightful expression in his face, and he found himself saying, "It isn't true, Adèle; you don't mean it; you can't do it."

She was clearly relieved that he had at last found his voice. She smiled her charming smile again, and explained that he must understand she did mean it; that she could do it—she could do, in fact, as she pleased. She had not been engaged to him, they had been completely free when they parted, and without any obligation, she as well as he. And as she loved another now, and not him, the affair was at an end. He must realize that, and resign himself, otherwise she should regret not having followed her father's advice of that morning and simply not been at home to Alfred. And she sat down opposite him, her slender hands clasped on her knees and with a distant look in her shining eyes.

Alfred felt that he needed all his self-command

not to do something ridiculous or dreadful. He did not know what he really wanted to do: seize her by the neck and strangle her or fling himself on the floor and cry like a child. But what was the use of thinking about it? He had no choice, he stood there stricken, and had barely the presence of mind to seize Adèle's hands as she was hastening away and hoarsely implore her to stay. Only a quarter of an hour! She must hear him! He had the right to ask that after all that had once passed between them. He had so much to tell her, more than she could imagine, and it was her duty to hear him. For if she knew everything, then she would also know that he was hers and hers only, and she was his alone. She would know that she could not belong to another, that he had won her in guilt and torment; that his lawful claims upon her must utterly sweep aside all others, that she was fettered to him irrevocably, forever and forever, and he to her. And, on his knees before her, clutching her hands in his, his eyes fixed on hers, he poured out his story, and told her all that had happened in the past year; how he had loved another before her; how he had gone abroad with her as she was ill and had no one on earth but himself; how the torment of his desire had nearly

worn him out, but the other had clung to him helplessly and he could not go; and how, at the end of his endurance, for love of her—of *her* whose hands he held in his, for a love the like of which had not been seen on earth, he had killed that other, who could not and would not have lived without him—poisoned her, half in pity and half in hatred; how the poor creature now slept under the sea-waves far away, martyr to a happiness that was to be beyond all others, like the price at which it had been won.

Adèle had let him keep her hands and her gaze was still plunged in his. She listened to what he told her, but he did not really know how she took it—whether as a fairy tale about strange far-off beings or as an item of news about people that were no concern of hers. Perhaps she did not believe what he was telling her. But, in any case, she did not care whether what he said were true or false. He felt his impotence more and more. He watched the words fall from her like a chill unheeded shower; and at the last, when he would have learned his fate from her lips, she merely shook her head. He looked at her fearfully, knowing yet unbelieving, and with a wild questioning look in his twitching eyes.

"No," she said, in a hard voice, "it is over."

And that "No" meant, he knew, that all was forever at an end. Adèle's face was quite inflexible. There was no trace in it of past affection, no sign of horror—only a devastating expression of indifference and boredom.

Alfred bowed his head with a vacant smile as though he understood, let go her hands, which she dropped coldly at her side, turned and went. The door behind him was still open, and he felt a chill breath on his neck. As he went down the stairs he knew that there was nothing left for him to do but to make an end. And it was so decided; he set all his doubts aside, and sauntered quietly homeward through that lovely spring day as though he were going to the sleep he needed after some wild carouse.

But someone was waiting for him in his room. It was the baron. Without taking Alfred's proffered hand he explained that he only wanted a few words with him, and, as Alfred nodded politely, he continued:

"I think it my duty to inform you that I consider you a scoundrel."

"Good!" thought Alfred, "that will be an excellent way out." And he answered calmly: "I am

at your disposal. Early to-morrow morning, if that suits you . . ."

The baron shook his head curtly. It became apparent that he had made his preparations as soon as they had landed. Two young gentlemen from the German Embassy were merely awaiting his further instructions and he said that he expected that his adversary, who was at home here, would find no difficulty in arranging for the affair to be settled before that same evening. Alfred believed he could promise to do so. For one instant he thought of confessing the whole truth to the baron; but from the terrible look of hatred that glittered from those cold eyes, he was afraid that the baron, who perhaps suspected the truth, might hand him over to justice: so he decided to say nothing.

Alfred found the two men he wanted without difficulty. One of them was Adèle's fiancé, the other a young officer with whom he had spent many a gay time in earlier days. At sunset, in a meadow by the Danube, a favourite spot for such encounters, he stood facing the baron. A sense of peace possessed him that, after the turmoil of the last few days, was almost happiness. As he looked down the barrel of the levelled pistol, and heard a distant voice rap

out, one by one, those last three seconds, that fell like three chill drops from the silent evening sky, he thought of one unutterably dear to him, over whose mouldering body surged the sea. And when he lay upon the ground, and something dark bent over him, enfolded him, and would not let him go, he felt at last content that his atonement was accepted, and that he was disappearing for her sake, and to her, into that nothingness he had so long desired.

THE DEATH OF A BACHELOR

THE DEATH OF A BACHELOR

SOMEONE HAD KNOCKED AT THE DOOR, QUITE gently, but the doctor awoke at once, turned on the light, and sat up in bed. He glanced at his wife who was sleeping quietly, picked up his dressing-gown, and went into the hall. He did not at once recognise the old woman who stood there, with the grey shawl over her head.

"The master is suddenly taken very bad," she said; "would the doctor be kind enough to come at once?"

Now he recognised the voice: it was the housekeeper of that old friend of his who had never married. The doctor's first thought was, "My friend is fifty-five years old, his heart has been out of order for years—it might well be something serious," and he said, "I'll come at once—will you wait for me?"

"Excuse me, doctor, but I have to hurry round to two other gentlemen," and she mentioned the names of the merchant and the author.

"But what is your business with them?"

"My master wants to see them again."

"See them again?"

"Yes, sir."

"He is sending for his friends," thought the doctor, "because he feels very near to death," . . . and he asked, "Is anyone with your master?"

"Of course," the old woman answered. "Johann is with him all the time." And she departed.

The doctor went back into his bedroom, and while he was dressing quickly and as noiselessly as possible, a feeling of bitterness came over him. It was not so much grief at the possibility of losing a good old friend, but the painful consciousness that they were all so far on in years, though not so long ago they had been young.

The doctor drove in an open carriage through the soft, heavy air of that spring night, to the neighbouring suburb where his friend lived. He looked up at the bedroom window which stood wide open, and whence the pale lamplight glimmered into the night.

The doctor went up the stairs, the servant opened the door, greeted him gravely, and dropped his left arm in a gesture of grief.

"What?" asked the doctor, catching his breath. "Am I too late?"

"Yes, sir," answered the servant, "my master died a quarter of an hour ago."

The doctor heaved a deep sigh and went into the room. There lay his dead friend, with thin, bluish, half-open lips, his arms outstretched over the white coverlet; his meagre beard was in disorder, and a few grey wisps of hair had strayed over his pale damp forehead. The silk-shaded electric lamp that stood on the night table cast a reddish shadow over the pillows. The doctor looked at the dead man. "When was he last in our house?" he thought to himself. "I remember it was snowing that evening. It must have been last winter." They had not seen much of each other latterly.

From without came the sound of horses' hoofs pawing the road. The doctor turned away from the dead man and looked across at the slender branches of the trees swaying in the night air.

The servant came in and the doctor then enquired how it had all happened.

The servant told a familiar story of a sudden attack of vomiting and breathlessness. Then his master had leapt out of bed, paced up and down the room, rushed to his writing-table, tottered back to bed again, where he lay racked with thirst and groaning and after one

last effort to raise himself he had sunk back upon the pillows. The doctor nodded and laid his hand on the dead man's forehead.

A carriage drew up. The doctor went over to the window. He saw the merchant get out and glance enquiringly up at the house. Unconsciously the doctor let his hand fall just as the servant had done who opened the door to him. The merchant threw back his head as if refusing to believe it, and the doctor shrugged his shoulders, left the window, and sat down, in sudden weariness, on a chair at the feet of the dead man. The merchant came in wearing a yellow overcoat unbuttoned, put his hat on a small table near the door, and shook the doctor by the hand. "How dreadful!" he said; "how did it happen?" And he stared dubiously at the dead man.

The doctor told him what he knew, and added: "Even if I had been able to come at once, I could have done nothing."

"Fancy," said the merchant, "it is exactly a week to-day since I last spoke to him at the theatre. I wanted to have supper with him afterwards, but he had one of his secret appointments."

"What, still?" said the doctor, with a gloomy smile.

Outside another carriage stopped. The merchant

went to the window. When he saw the author getting out, he drew back, not wanting to announce the sad news by his expression. The doctor had taken a cigarette out of his case and was twisting it about in an embarrassed sort of way. "It's a habit I've had since my hospital days," he remarked apologetically. "When I left a sick-room at night, the first thing I always did was to light a cigarette, whether I had been to give an injection of morphia or to certify a death."

"Do you know," said the merchant, "how long it is since I saw a corpse? Fourteen years—not since my father lay in his coffin."

"But—your wife?"

"I saw my wife in her last moments, but—not afterwards."

The author appeared, shook hands with the other two, and glanced doubtfully at the bed. Then he walked resolutely up to it and looked earnestly at the dead man, yet not without a contemptuous twitch of the lips. "So it was he," he said to himself. For he had played with the question which of his more intimate friends was to be the first to take the last journey.

The housekeeper came in. With tears in her eyes

she sank down by the bed, sobbed, and wrung her hands. The author laid his hand gently and soothingly on her shoulder.

The merchant and the doctor stood at the window, and the dank air of the spring night played upon their foreheads.

"It is really very odd," began the merchant, "that he has sent for all of us. Did he want to see us all gathered round his death-bed? Had he something important to say to us?"

"As far as I'm concerned," said the doctor, with a sad smile, "it would not be odd, as I am a doctor. And you," he said, turning to the merchant, "you were at times his business adviser. So perhaps it was a matter of some last instructions that he wanted to give you personally."

"That is possible," said the merchant.

The housekeeper had left the room, and the friends could hear her talking to the other servant in the hall. The author was still standing by the bed carrying on a silent dialogue with the dead man.

"I think," whispered the merchant to the doctor, "that latterly he saw more of our friend. Perhaps he can throw some light on the question."

The author stood motionless, gazing steadily into

the closed eyes of the dead man. His hands, which held his broad-brimmed grey hat, were crossed behind his back. The two others began to grow impatient, and the merchant went up to him and cleared his throat.

"Three days ago," observed the author, "I went for a two-hours' walk with him among the hills and vineyards. Would you like to know what he talked about? A trip to Sweden, that he had planned for the summer, a new Rembrandt portfolio just published by Watson's in London, and last of all about Santos Dumont. He went into all sorts of mathematical and scientific details about a dirigible airship, which, to be frank with you, I did not entirely grasp. He certainly was not thinking about death. It must indeed be true that at a certain age people again stop thinking about it."

The doctor had gone into the adjoining room. Here he might certainly venture to light his cigarette. The sight of white ashes in the bronze tray on the writing-table struck him as strange and almost uncanny. He wondered why he was still there at all, as he sat down on the chair by the writing-table. He had the right to go as soon as he liked, since he had obviously been sent for as a doctor. For their friend-

ship had nearly come to an end. "At my time of life," he went on, pursuing his reflection, "it is quite impossible for a man like me to keep friends with someone who has no profession and never has had one. What would he have taken up if he had not been rich? He would probably have turned to literature: he was very clever." And he remembered many malicious but pointed remarks the dead man had made, more especially about the works of their common friend, the author.

The author and the merchant came in. The author assumed an expression of disapproval when he saw the doctor sitting at the deserted writing-table with a cigarette in his hand, which was, however, still unlit, and he closed the door behind him. Here, however, they were to some extent in another world.

"Have you any sort of idea? . . ." asked the merchant.

"About what?" asked the author absent-mindedly.

"What made him send for us, and just us?"

The author thought it unnecessary to look for any special reason. "Our friend," he explained, "felt death was upon him, and if he had lived a rather solitary life, at least latterly, at such an hour people who are by nature socially inclined probably feel

the need of seeing their friends about them."

"He had a mistress, though," remarked the merchant.

"Oh, a mistress," repeated the author, and contemptuously raised his eyebrows.

At this moment the doctor noticed that the middle drawer of the writing-table was half open.

"I wonder if his will is here?" he said.

"That's no concern of ours," observed the merchant, "at least at this moment. And in any case there is a married sister living in London."

The servant came in. He respectfully asked what arrangements he should make about having the body laid out, the funeral, and the mourning cards. He knew that a will was in the possession of his master's lawyer, but he was doubtful whether it contained instructions in these matters. The author found the room stuffy and close; he drew aside the heavy red curtains over one of the windows and threw open both casements, and a great waft of the dark blue spring night poured into the room. The doctor asked the servant whether he had any idea why the dead man had sent for him, because, if he remembered rightly, it was years since he had been summoned to that house in his capacity as doctor. The servant, who ob-

viously expected the question, pulled a swollen-looking wallet from his jacket-pocket, took out a sheet of paper, and explained that seven years ago his master had written down the names of the friends whom he wanted sent for when he was dying. So that, even if the dead man had been unconscious at the time, he would have ventured to send for the gentlemen on his own responsibility.

The doctor took the sheet of paper from the servant's hand and found five names written on it: in addition to those present was the name of a friend who had died two years ago, and another that he did not know. The servant explained that the latter was a manufacturer whose house the dead man used to visit nine or ten years ago, and whose address had been lost and forgotten. The three looked at each other with uneasy curiosity. "What does that mean?" asked the merchant. "Did he intend to make a speech in his last hours?"

"A funeral oration on himself, no doubt," added the author.

The doctor had turned his eyes on the open drawer of the writing-table, and suddenly these words, in large Roman letters, stared at him from the cover of an envelope: "To my friends."

"Hullo!" he cried, took the envelope, held it up, and showed it to the others. "This is for us." He turned to the servant and, with a movement of the head, indicated that he was not wanted. The servant went.

"For us?" said the author, with wide-open eyes.

"There can be no doubt," said the doctor, "that we are justified in opening this."

"It's our duty," said the merchant, and buttoned up his overcoat.

The doctor had taken a paper-knife from a glass tray, opened the envelope, laid the letter down, and put on his eyeglasses. The author took advantage of the brief interval to pick up the letter and unfold it. "As it is for all of us," he remarked casually, and bent over the writing-table so that the light from the shaded lamp should fall on the paper. Near him stood the merchant. The author remained seated.

"You might read it aloud," said the merchant, and the author began.

" 'To my friends,' "—he stopped with a smile—"yes, it's written here also," and he went on reading in a tone of admirable detachment. " 'About a quarter of an hour ago I breathed my last. You are assembled at my death-bed, and you are preparing to read this

letter together—if it still exists in the hour of my death, I ought to add. For it might so happen that I should come to a better frame of mind . . .' "

"What?" asked the doctor.

" 'A better frame of mind,' " repeated the author, and continued: " 'and decide to destroy this letter, for it can do not the slightest good to me, and, at the very least, may cause you some unpleasant hours, even if it does not absolutely poison the life of one or other of you.' "

"Poison our lives?" repeated the doctor, in a wondering tone, as he polished his eyeglasses.

"Quicker," said the merchant in a husky voice.

The author continued. " 'And I ask myself what kind of evil humour it is that sends me to the writing-table to-day and induces me to write down words whose effect I shall never be able to read upon your faces. And even if I could the pleasure I should get would be too trifling to serve as an excuse for the incredible act I am now about to commit with feelings of the heartiest satisfaction.' "

"Ha!" cried the doctor in a voice he did not recognise as his own. The author threw a glance of irritation at him, and read on, quicker and with less expression than before. " 'Yes, it is an evil humour, and

nothing else, for I have really nothing whatever against any of you. I like you all very well in my own way, just as you like me in your way. I never despised you, and if I often laughed at you, I never mocked you. No, not once—and least of all in those hours of which you are so soon to call to mind such vivid and such painful images. Why, then, this evil humour? Perhaps it arose from a deep and not essentially ignoble desire not to leave the world with so many lies upon my soul. I might imagine so, if I had even once had the slightest notion of what men call remorse.' "

"Oh, get on to the end of it," said the doctor in a new and abrupt tone.

The merchant, without more ado, took the letter from the author, who felt a sort of paralysis creeping over his fingers, glanced down it quickly and read the words: " 'It was fate, my dear friends, and I could not alter it. I have had the wives of all of you: yes, every one.' "

The merchant stopped suddenly and turned back to the first sheet.

"The letter was written nine years ago," said the merchant.

"Go on," said the author sharply.

And the merchant proceeded. " 'Of course the circumstances were different in each case. With one of them I lived almost as though we had been married, for many months. The second was more or less what the world is accustomed to call a mad adventure. With the third, the affair went so far that I wanted us to kill ourselves together. The fourth I threw downstairs because she betrayed me with another. And the last was my mistress on one occasion only. Do you all breathe again—my good friends? You should not. It was perhaps the loveliest hour of my life . . . and hers. Well, my friends, I have nothing more to tell you. Now I am going to fold up this letter, put it away in my writing-desk—and there may it lie until my humour changes and I destroy it, or until it is given into your hands in that hour when I lie upon my death-bed. Farewell.' "

The doctor took the letter from the merchant's hands and read it with apparent care from the beginning to the end. Then he looked up at the merchant who stood by with folded arms and gazed down at him with something like derision.

"Although your wife died last year," said the doctor calmly, "it is none the less true."

The author paced up and down the room, jerked

his head convulsively from side to side a few times, and suddenly hissed out through his clenched teeth, "the swine," and then stared in front of him as though looking for something that had dissolved into air. He was trying to recall the image of the youthful creature that he had once held in his arms as wife. Other women's faces appeared, often recalled but long since, he had thought, forgotten, but he could not bring before his mind the one he wanted. For his wife's body was withered and held no attraction for him, and it was so long since she had been his beloved. But she had become something other than that to him, something more and something nobler: a friend and a comrade; full of pride at his successes, full of sympathy with his disappointments, full of insight into his deepest nature. It seemed to him not impossible that the dead man had, in his wickedness, secretly envied him his comrade and tried to take her away. For all those others—what had they really meant to him? He called to mind certain adventures, some of old days and some more recent; there had been enough and to spare of them in his varied literary life, and his wife had smiled or wept over them as they went their course. Where was all this now? As faded as that far-off hour when his wife had

flung herself into the arms of a man of no account, without reflection, perhaps without thought: almost as extinct as the recollection of that same hour in the dead skull that lay within on that pitifully crumpled pillow. But perhaps this last will and testament was a bundle of lies—the last revenge of a poor commonplace fellow who knew himself condemned to eternal oblivion, upon a distinguished man over whose works death has been given no power. This was not at all improbable. But even if it were true—it was a petty revenge and unsuccessful in either case.

The doctor stared at the sheet of paper that lay before him, and thought of his gentle, ever kindly wife, now growing old, who lay asleep at home. He thought also of his three children: of his eldest who was now doing his one year's military service, of his tall daughter, who was engaged to a lawyer, and of the youngest, who was so graceful and charming that a famous artist, who had lately met her at a ball, had asked if he might paint her. He thought of his comfortable home, and all this that surged up at him from the dead man's letter seemed to him not so much untrue as, in some mysterious way, almost sublimely insignificant. He scarcely felt that

at this moment he had experienced anything new. A strange epoch in his existence came into his mind, fourteen or fifteen years before, when he had met with certain troubles over his profession, and, worn out and nearly crazy, had planned to leave the city, his wife and family. At the same time he had entered upon a kind of wild, reckless existence, in which a strange hysterical woman had played a part, who had subsequently committed suicide over another lover. How his life had gradually returned to its original course he could not now remember in the least. But it must have been in those bad times, which had passed away as they had come, like an illness, that his wife had betrayed him. Yes, it must so have happened, and it was clear to him that he had really always known it. Was she not once on the point of confessing it? Had she not given him hints? Thirteen or fourteen years ago. . . . When could it have been . . . ? Wasn't it one summer on a holiday trip —late in the evening on the terrace of some hotel? In vain he tried to recall those vanished words.

The merchant stood at the window and stared into the soft pale night. He was determined he would remember his dead wife. But however much he searched his inmost consciousness, at first he could only see

himself in the light of a grey morning, standing in black clothes outside a curtained doorway, receiving and returning sympathetic handshakes, with a stale reek of carbolic and flowers in his nostrils. Slowly he succeeded in recalling to his mind the image of his dead wife. And yet at first it was but the image of an image for he could only see the large portrait in a gilt frame that hung over the piano in the drawing-room at home and displayed a haughty-looking lady of thirty in a ball dress. Then at last she herself appeared as a young girl, who, nearly twenty years before, pale and trembling, had accepted his proposal of marriage. Then there arose before him the appearance of a woman in all her splendour, enthroned beside him in a theatre-box, gazing at the stage, but inwardly far away. Then he remembered a passionate creature who welcomed him with unexpected warmth on his return from a long journey. Swiftly again his thoughts turned to a nervous tearful being, with greenish heavy eyes, who had poisoned his days with all manner of evil humours. Next he saw an alarmed, affectionate mother, in a light morning frock, watching by the bedside of a sick child who, none the less, died. Last of all, he saw a pale, outstretched creature in a room reeking of ether, her mouth so pitifully

drawn down at the corners, and cold beads of sweat on her forehead, who had shaken his very soul with pity. He knew that all these pictures, and a hundred others, that flashed past his mind's eye with incredible speed, were of one and the same being who had been lowered into the grave two years ago, over whom he had wept, and after whose death he had felt freed from bondage. It seemed to him he must choose one out of all these pictures to reach some definite reaction; for at present he was tossed by shame and anger, groping in the void. He stood there irresolute, and gazed across at the houses in their gardens, shimmering faintly red and yellow in the moonlight and looking like pale painted walls with only air behind them.

"Good-night," said the doctor and got up.

The merchant turned towards him and said: "There's nothing more for me to do here either."

The author had picked up the letter, stuffed it unobtrusively into his coat pocket, and opened the door into the adjoining room. Slowly he walked up to the death-bed, and the others watched him looking down silently at the corpse, his hands behind his back. Then they turned away.

In the hall the merchant said to the servant: "As

regards the funeral, it is possible that the will in possession of the lawyers may contain some further instructions."

"And don't forget," pursued the doctor, "to telegraph to your master's sister in London."

"To be sure, sir," replied the servant, as he opened the front door.

The author overtook them on the doorstep. "I can take you both with me," said the doctor, whose carriage was waiting.

"Thank you, no," said the merchant. "I shall walk."

He shook hands with both of them and walked down the road towards the city, glad to feel the soft night air upon his face.

The author got into the carriage with the doctor. The birds were beginning to sing in the garden. The carriage drove past the merchant, and the three men raised their hats, ironically polite, each with an identical expression on his face. "Shall we soon see another play of yours?" the doctor asked the author in his usual voice.

The latter launched into an account of the extraordinary difficulties involved in the production of his latest drama which, he had to confess, contained the most sweeping attacks on everything generally held

to be sacred. The doctor nodded and did not listen. Nor did the author, for the familiar sentences fell from his lips as though he had learned them by heart.

Both men got out at the doctor's house, and the carriage drove away.

The doctor rang. They both stood and said nothing. As the footsteps of the porter approached, the author said, "Good-night, my dear doctor"; and he added slowly, with a twitch of his nostrils, "I shan't mention this to my wife, you know."

The doctor threw a sidelong glance at him and smiled his charming smile.

The door opened, they shook each other by the hand, the doctor disappeared into the passage, and the door slammed. The author went.

He felt in his breast pocket. Yes, the letter was there. His wife would find it sealed and secure among his papers. And with that strange power of imagination that was peculiarly his own, he could already hear her whispering over his grave, "Oh, how splendid of you . . . how noble!"

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